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Faith in Action for Social Justice

THE WRITING'S ON THE WALL

Reading the language
of public spaces

by Marcia Good



PLUS:

Trump vs. Jesus • What Muslims need from Christians

Bill McKibben: Keeping civil disobedience civil

My neighbor, Boko Haram • The legacy of Barack Obama





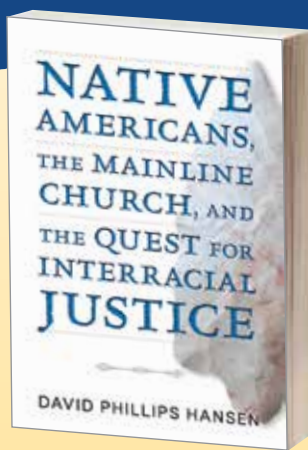
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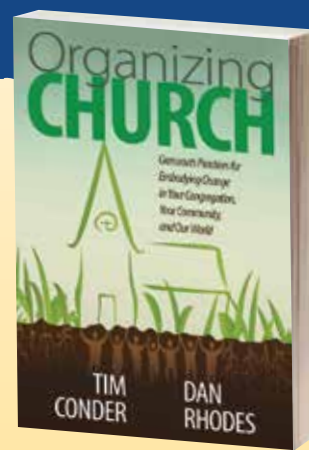
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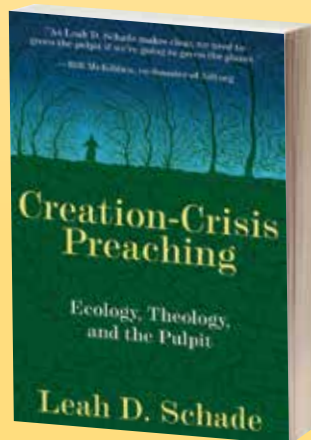
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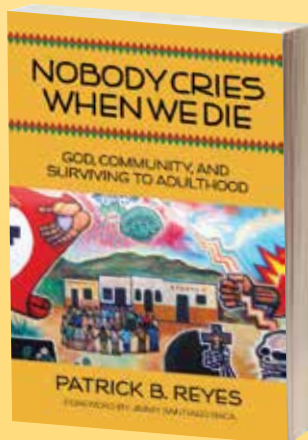
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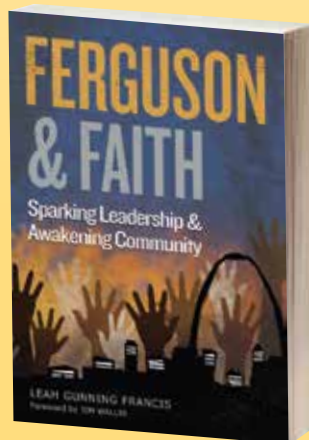
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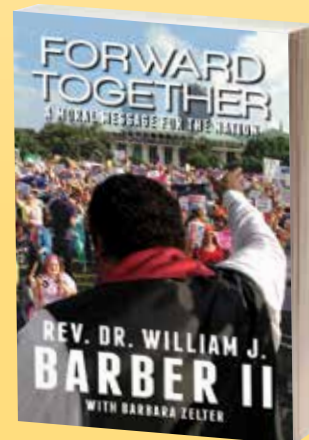
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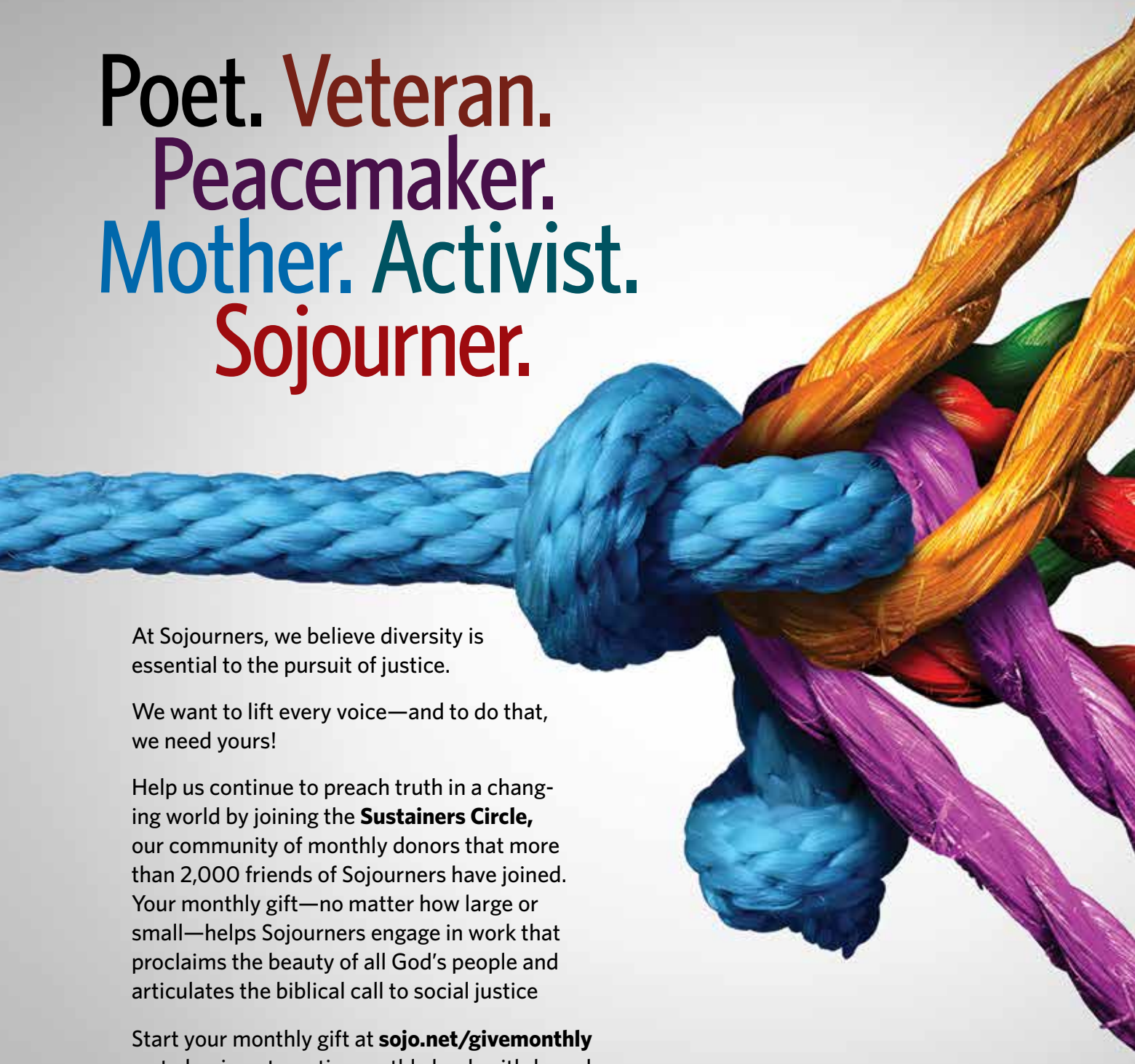
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CAPITOL HILL doesn't have what Marcia Good would call a rich "scriptorial landscape."

In other parts of D.C., you'll find elaborate murals, hand-lettered posters affixed with wheat paste, and wildstyle graffiti. But in the blocks surrounding our nation's legislative branch, the ephemera of the street is muted: old stickers for political candidates and an occasional square of gray paint covering some comment deemed inappropriate for a neighborhood on the national historic register.

Or so we thought. Inspired by this issue's cover story, we spent a chilly afternoon

poking around outside our office on Capitol Hill looking for any kind of nonsanctioned text. It's an assignment that Good, an anthropologist, often assigns to her students as a way to get them thinking about "why people write" and "what that means for the human differences that coalesce in urbanscapes."

Like Good's students, we found things we'd never noticed before: a warning against "electromagnetic mind control"; a phone number for a local shelter for homeless youth; the stylized tagging work of "Rekos." We found a series of matchbook-sized stickers on the back of street signs reminding

viewers: "We're all in this together," "Sup hello! What's good?!" and "You are beautiful." "Eat at home," suggested a sticker on a sign right outside our office.

"What does it mean to not see what is right in front of us?" asks Good. Even as we consider the macro-changes wrought by digital culture ("The Internet Endureth Forever..." by Kate Ott) or the problems with a militarized approach to counterterrorism ("My Neighbor, Boko Haram," by Charles Kwuelum), perhaps the simple act of paying attention—especially to those voices seldom noticed in public spaces—is a spiritual practice we can all revive. ■

Letters

Spirit of Compassion

I read with great interest the article on Northmead Assembly of God's Circle of Hope AIDS clinic in Zambia ("When the Spirit Comes Down," by Wonsuk Ma, January 2017), because I spent six months in 2011 conducting research there with support groups for people living with HIV. Clinic clients I interviewed reaffirmed my observations about staff members' dedication, often reporting that they were grateful that the clinic was in their low-income neighborhood. Most crucially, I noted how staff members showed acceptance and compassion toward all clients. While the clinic faces challenges—long lines, clients who sometimes do not adhere to their medications, excellent staff members who may be "poached" by other donors—it does important work in Zambia's AIDS response.

Amy Patterson
Sewanee, Tennessee

Charismatic Failure

It is encouraging to hear about the good work being done in Pentecostal churches around the globe ("When the Spirit Comes Down"). However, there was not one word in the article about the plight of homosexuals living in these societies. These churches are often at the forefront of oppressing gay people in the name of religion. Until we all confront the horrific situation of gay people (ostracism, forced marriage, beatings, prison, and execution) in so many places,

especially Africa and the Caribbean, I can't take these churches or their brand of religion seriously.

Robin Van Liew
Holden, Massachusetts

Crowning Achievement?

Thank you for providing a magazine that I am able to count on for intelligence and sensitivity in both your writing and reporting. However, I must take exception to the claim that Elizabeth I "founded" the Anglican Church ("Entering my 'Power Decade,'" by Catherine Woodiwiss, January 2017). While it is true she is credited for the eponymous settlement, those acts of Parliament did not "found" anything that did not already exist. They smoothed the waters so that the English church could proclaim the gospel in relative peace.

Carlton Kelley
Traverse City, Michigan

Hillbilly Business

I want to thank you for publishing the article by Susan K. Smith on John Rush in your December 2016 issue ("Can Business Be Beautiful?"). It presents a different (and more accurate) example of Appalachia than does J.D. Vance's book *Hillbilly Elegy*. As a born-and-bred hillbilly, I take great umbrage at Vance's book. It is a very courageous memoir of one family, but that's what it is—the story of one very dysfunctional family and the salutary effects of the Marines on one very mixed-up young man.

Most poor and working-class Appalachians have not become as disoriented and dysfunctional as Vance's family. Many of them, like Rush, have started enterprises of their own or are otherwise engaged at jobs they find rewarding. While not all these businesses are social enterprises as is Rush's, they all nevertheless indicate successful adjustments to situations in which people find themselves.

Mike Smathers
Crossville, Tennessee

Assets in Heaven

Please do more articles on businesses that have doing good in the world as their bottom line ("Can Business Be Beautiful?"). Business owner John Rush makes a point about the profit-making business model that it is the love of money that is a problem, not having money itself. A current line of research, however, is showing that it isn't as simple as that; money and decision-making power over others quickly reduce compassionate awareness and behavior. Jesus was right about wealth: Good motivations and intentions are not enough. Any condition that reduces our sense of shared vulnerability with others works against our ability to live lives of universal love.

Arden Mahlberg
Madison, Wisconsin

Your turn. Write to letters@sojo.net or *Letters, Sojourners*, 408 C St. NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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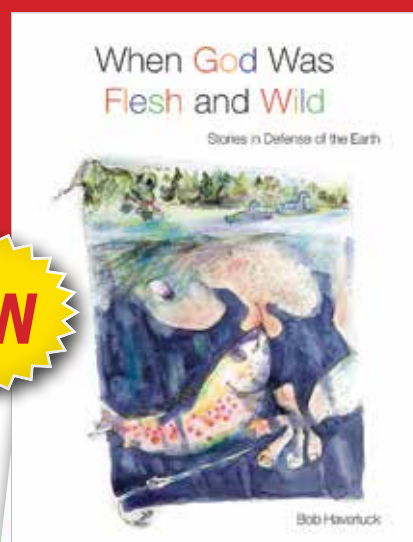
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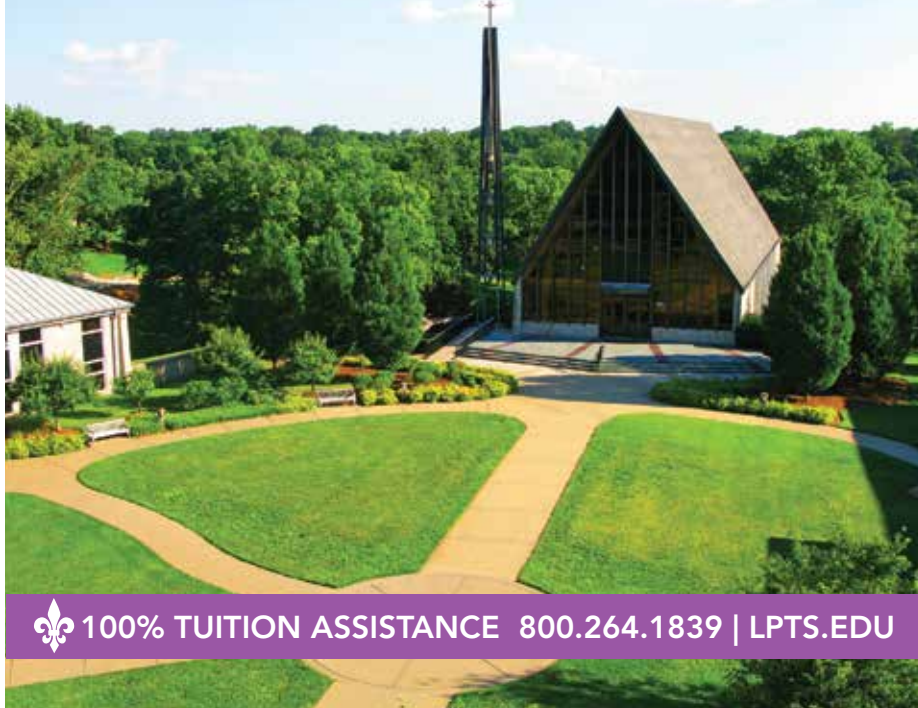


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BY JIM WALLIS

The Legacy of Barack Obama



PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA has only been out of office for a few weeks, but his legacy is secure in ways that are critical to our national identity—and quite separate from his policy successes and failures.

One lens through which we can understand Obama's relevance and lasting historical legacy is found, surprisingly, in the book of Genesis. Genesis 1:26-27 gives us the first biblical description of human origin: "Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, to be like us. ... Humankind was created as God's reflection: in the divine image God created them; female and male, God made them.'"

This text is foundational to how we understand God's purpose for the world and for human beings. Perhaps most important, it establishes the

counted not at all).

Choosing an African-American man for the highest office in our nation—making him the most powerful person in the world for eight years—was and is a fundamental blow to white supremacy. The Obama presidency marked a historic era in the longstanding and ongoing movement to undo white supremacy and privilege.

ON ELECTION NIGHT in 2008, our home hosted an election-watch party, attended mostly by 20-somethings. Early in the evening, Obama was expected to win, and most of the young people at my house were celebrating, dancing in the streets of our multiracial neighborhood. But I, like most of the older black men who lived in our neighborhood, was not sure if I really believed that an African-American president would be elected in our lifetimes. If in the end all the "undecideds" went against him, Barack Obama would lose.

After a while, I was the only one left in the house watching the returns, as the votes Obama needed for his electoral victory were officially tabulated. Finally, victory was declared. When that happened, I quietly and privately broke down in tears. But soon I went out to the streets to join those of the next generation who were ready to, as I've put it, help build the bridge to the new, emerging America, one in which former "minorities" are becoming the majority.

But the white backlash began almost immediately. The never-ending accusations and falsehoods started, with even a conspiratorial, racist campaign alleging that the new black president didn't have a U.S. birth certificate and wasn't really one of "us," that is, a real American. Of course, that same lie would help Donald Trump launch his own political career, which has culminated in



Reuters

the ultimate insult of Trump's election as Obama's successor.

BARACK OBAMA'S LEGACY has and always will be deeply entrenched in the vision of a "beloved community," as Martin Luther King Jr. put it, where our public and civil life is rooted in the spiritual foundation of the truth that *all of us* are created in the image of God. That is the word, God's Word, that will ultimately defeat the lingering original sin of American society, no matter how far away that goal now seems.

Barack Obama's legacy is indeed a call to repentance—a call to turn around and go in a whole new direction on our path toward a spiritually transformed America where neither punishment nor privilege are the result of skin color. We have a long way to go on that path, with much systemic injustice remaining that was not solved by electing President Obama, and which may now be made even worse under Trump.

But as Dr. King reminded us, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." I still believe that, and that night in November 2008 is a big reason why. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine. This column is adapted from Wallis' foreword to Mr. President: Interfaith Perspectives on the Historic Presidency of Barack H. Obama, compiled by Barbara Williams-Skinner and Darryl Sims (2017).

The Obama presidency marked a historic era in the movement to undo white supremacy and privilege.

foundational value of every human as being made in the image of God (*imago dei*).

This biblical revelation—and America's racial history—is why the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008 is of such lasting importance. The United States was founded on the original sin of white supremacy, which declared that some people were less human than others; the nation was built on the kidnapping and enslavement of Africans and the displacement and eradication of Native Americans. In the process, the founders of our nation cast aside the notion of *imago dei*. The Constitution enshrined the notion that African slaves could be considered three-fifths of a person for the purposes of congressional representation (and Native Americans

By David Cortright

Donald Trump's Nuclear Tweets

Restarting the Cold War, 140 characters at a time.

DONALD TRUMP HAS released many bizarre and disturbing tweets in recent months, none more alarming than his statements in December that the “U.S. must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability” and “Let it be an arms race. We will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all.”

Commentators were dumfounded by the messages, which seemed to come out of nowhere, and dismissed them as bluster not to be taken seriously. The tweets were deeply troubling, however, and indicate that the new president is ignorant of nuclear realities and intent on ratcheting up nuclear spending and challenging others to keep up.

Thankfully, the potential competitors in such a contest seem uninterested. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced during his annual press conference the day after Trump's messages that Russia will reduce military spending next year as it adjusts to economic recession at home. China has indicated no change in its long-standing policy of maintaining a small but capable nuclear force. Trump may be ready for an arms race, but as of now his rivals seem to have no interest in running.

Nuclear bravado can change these calculations, however, especially if it is accompanied by substantial increases in spending for new weapons. Trump has promised to give more money to the military and bolster nuclear capability. U.S. weapons makers Boeing and Lockheed are competing for multibillion-dollar contracts to replace and upgrade the U.S. land-based missile force. Former Defense Secretary William Perry has argued that the plan to rebuild nuclear missiles is wasteful, unnecessary, and dangerous.

It's a risky game Trump wants to play. If the U.S. actually proceeds to “greatly expand and strengthen” its nuclear arsenal, Russia and China could shift their stance from forbearance to reaction. This is the history of the arms race that Trump seems to want to replay. When one side increases its nuclear



Joshua Roberts/Reuters

A military aide carries the briefcase containing nuclear weapons codes as President Barack Obama returns to the White House last May.

capacity, the other side follows suit. It's an action-reaction cycle that during the Cold War reached absurdly dangerous levels.

As for the claim that the U.S. can “outmatch” and “outlast” others, it may be helpful to recall that during the peak of the Cold War, the Soviet Union surpassed the U.S. in estimated total numbers of

massive disarmament campaigns swept through Western Europe. Political leaders in Washington and Moscow finally came to their senses and began negotiations leading to nuclear reductions and an end to the Cold War.

Trump's tweet about expanding nuclear weapons included the curious closing

The plan to rebuild nuclear missiles is wasteful, unnecessary, and dangerous.

weapons—topping out at an insane level of 40,000 nukes, compared to a peak U.S. level of 31,000 weapons, enough on each side to destroy the world many times over.

It was in the mid-1980s that a miracle of history happened. The nuclear freeze movement emerged in the U.S. and

phrase “until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes.” Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, and the elder George Bush showed what that means. They sharply reduced nuclear-weapons levels and began to establish a more cooperative relationship between East and West.

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Gorbachev and Reagan even discussed the complete elimination of nuclear weapons at the Reykjavik summit in 1986.

The hopeful vision of those halcyon days is gone, but the example of what Reagan and Bush accomplished through nuclear disarmament with Russia still stands, and it could be a model for sensible nuclear policy today.

By Hussein Rashid

What Muslims Need from Christians

Since 9/11, Muslims have been held to an impossible standard in the U.S. And now it's getting worse.

RELIGION IS AN EASY language for people to use to define conflict. The people most willing to speak about what religion demands are the ones least likely to be invested in the sacrifices religion requires. They want the power that they believe they can claim through religion.

Those same voices who engage in this idle worship now hold the reins of power in the U.S. government. And they seek to exterminate Muslims. There are concerns of a Muslim registry and internment camps. More extreme fears consider other types of camps, imagining a return of the Holocaust. These fears are not unfounded, nor are they out of character with what President Trump's advisers and appointees have said.

Yet these parallels are *so* powerful that I think it may be difficult for them to be realized. What I think is more likely in the near term is a different historical parallel. At the waning of another empire, the Colosseum became a space where individuals were martyred for what they believed, for entertainment.

An individual loss may be horrible, but the individual's community may still believe it is safe. But death can come by a thousand cuts. The lion that chooses one life at a time remains a ravenous beast—the whole community will be vilified and will eventually die, just not quickly. And that beast will need a new food source.

The mayor of New York announced a 35-percent increase in hate crimes in the city in the month following the election. During that time there were 43 hate crimes documented. In December, a Muslim

Here's a new tweet for Trump: "Nuclear weapons expensive, unnecessary, dangerous. Cancel." ■

David Cortright is a professor of peace studies at Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and former executive director of the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority worker wearing her uniform and a hijab was pushed down a flight of stairs at Grand Central station, and a Muslim police officer was threatened, in front of her teenage son, with having her throat slit. In August, two Muslim leaders were shot to death after leaving prayers at their mosque. For years,

True faith cannot be meek while innocents are brought to the Colosseum.

the New York police department has spied on Muslims where we pray.

Like the Greek word "martyr," the Arabic word for martyr is related to bearing witness for one's faith. A Muslim testifies every day, "I witness that there is no deity except for God." This daily act of witness is now an act of potential suffering. Instead of just weeping in awe at the mention of the Divine, a Muslim now weeps in fear for being a Muslim.

IN THIS MOMENT, Muslims need more than Christian allies—we need protectors in the name of Jesus. I know my Christian friends stand with me and do so because of their faith. What I want to hear now is this clarion call: Jesus demands Christians to stand with those who have no other protector. As a Muslim, I need to see Jesus' love embodied in the world. I need to *see*, not just hear, Christians saying "not in my name."

I need Christians to act against those who would spread hate in Jesus' name.

From the Archives

March 1978

Power vs. Holy Week

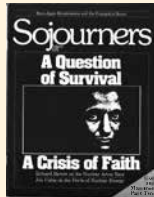
"IF I HAD been a journalist at the time of the crucifixion, I would have been hanging around Herod's palace talking to Pilate and disregarding [Jesus]." Out of the deluge of words spoken at the National Religious Broadcasters' convention in Washington, D.C., in January 1978, this statement by Malcolm Muggeridge stood out. First, it had immediate personal relevance to this reporter: I was so busy chasing down celebrity Christians for interviews that if Jesus Christ had walked in, I certainly would have rushed by the out-of-place character. ...

At the time of the crucifixion, most Americans would have focused their attention on Herod, Pilate, their armies, their courts, and their rationales for doing what was "necessary" for law and order. Or for morality and family. Or for keeping the economy on an even keel. Or for the integrity and stability of the empire.

Most of us would have done it then, because we do it today. As good American citizens, and as reporters and as consumers of the news, we wittingly and unwittingly tag along with the crucifiers. We are fascinated with power.

The fascination with power carries over from our secular life to our religious life. Come Easter and the resurrection, we feel quite comfortable glorifying God the almighty, the omnipotent. We forget where we were three days earlier. We neglect our complicity in the cross event. And in the process, we ravel the whole fabric of Holy Week. ■

Jim Stenzel was a Sojourners associate editor when this article appeared.



Those who wield the sword of hate, who think this is Jesus' mission, need to be met by Christians who raise the shield of love.

Since 9/11, Muslims have been held to an impossible standard in the United States. We are held responsible for apologizing whenever terrorist attacks occur—even when the victims are primarily Muslims. Those U.S. Christians who were silent while Muslims were vilified as "America's greatest

enemy" now need to act.

True faith is humble, but it cannot be silent. It cannot be meek while innocents are brought to the Colosseum.

Hussein Rashid is founder of Islamicate, L3C, a consultancy that focuses on religious literacy. He is a lifelong New Yorker committed to interfaith relations and working for the common good.

By Ellen Furnari

The Birth of a 'Peace Army'

Unarmed civilian protection works, and the practice is growing.

IN DECEMBER 2014, the United Nations approved a resolution put forth by Bangladesh and more than 100 other countries that included a reference to "unarmed civilian protection." This was the first time the phrase had been referenced in an official U.N. General Assembly document.

The following year, a U.N. report noted that "unarmed civilian protection is a method for direct protection of civilians and violence reduction that has grown in practice and recognition. In the last few years, it has especially proven its effectiveness to protect women and girls."

Last fall, Tiffany Easthom, executive director of Nonviolent Peaceforce, addressed a special U.N. session on unarmed civilian protection with a bold proposal: "The [U.N.] Security Council could ensure the centrality of unarmed strategies in protection of civilian mandates."

Unarmed civilian protection, or UCP, is just what it sounds like: nonviolent action by civilians to protect other civilians from political violence. The peacekeeping practice is rooted in the call for a "peace army"—a *Shanti Sena*—by Mohandas Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, whom the pope referenced in his 2017 World Day of Peace message.

Peace Brigades International is generally credited with initiating the current practice in the 1980s in Guatemala. Peace Brigades International focused on specific strategies based on the principles and practices of nonviolence, the primacy of local actors, independence, and for many but not all organizations, nonpartisanship, in

an organized, disciplined way.

Many organizations around the world are currently practicing this method of intervention, including Peace Brigades International, Nonviolent Peaceforce, Christian Peacemaker Teams, SweFOR, Meta Peace Team, Operation Dove, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship, and others.

Christian Peacemaker Teams, for example, operates in Mexico, Kurdistan, Colombia, Palestine, First Nations territories in Canada, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the United States. Its mission is to wage unarmed intervention "by committed peace-makers ready to risk injury and death in bold attempts to transform lethal conflict through the nonviolent power of God's truth and love."

Strategies of unarmed civilian protection have effectively defended people in a wide variety of contexts and cultures. Both the Meta Peace Team and Nonviolent Peaceforce recently have responded to invitations to work with the Standing Rock community and resistance in North Dakota.

HOW DOES UNARMED civilian protection work? In a community experiencing threats and acts of violence against people, an interfaith group might decide to receive training in unarmed protection. Based on that training and analysis of the context, the group might reach out to opposing groups.

For example, they might contact the police to discuss the police's role and also reach out to organizations fomenting

violence and to people receiving threats of violence. From those conversations specific protection plans would be developed. Currently there are all-women unarmed civilian protection teams successfully operating in the Philippines and South Sudan, contributing to community security.

Why does it work? Often people will respond when called specifically and directly to do their jobs (police), or to act humanely (various community groups and individuals), not only because they are reminded of their own humanity but because they know others are watching them and they may be reported on. Additionally, initial contacts may lead to shared meetings, helping people to know

“Unarmed civilian protection has proven its effectiveness to protect women and girls.”

each other and respond to each other’s needs. Violence often requires anonymity and a pack mentality to be carried out. Shining a light on the sources of threats may make that anonymity impossible. Direct communication can break up the pack mentality.

Last fall, Nonviolent Peaceforce joined with Australia, Costa Rica, the Netherlands, and the Philippines at a high-level U.N. briefing to deepen understanding about this cost-effective, highly durable method of conflict prevention, intervention, and post-conflict transformation.

“Peacekeeping began as an unarmed endeavor,” said Ralph Mamiya, of the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations. “Those are its origins. It’s become increasingly armed and increasingly militarized over the years, but the first [U.N.] peacekeepers did not carry weapons.”

Nothing is guaranteed to stop violence. Unarmed civilian protection is not magic. But a well-developed set of principles and practices that works, all over the world, is worth supporting. ■

Ellen Furnari is editor of Wielding Nonviolence in the Midst of Violence: Case Studies of Good Practices in Unarmed Civilian Protection (2016).

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QUOTED

“Orthodoxy matters less to me than human lives.” —Cindy Brandt

on why she quit her job at a missionary school rather than stop supporting LGBTQ relationships

sojo.net/quit

from the editors of sojo.net

NEWS



DePaul University's Abdul-Malik Ryan

Radical Pedagogy

Late in 2016, more than 200 academics found themselves named to the “Professor Watchlist” created by the conservative organization Turning Point USA. The list was intended to “document mistreatment of conservative students or the spreading of leftist propaganda,” explained Abdul-Malik Ryan (sojo.net/depaul), a Muslim chaplain at DePaul University whose name appears on the list. “[But] in my case—as appears to be the case with many named—the list does not make any allegation that I have done either of those things. ... [T]heir actions indicate a desire to silence people who have views they find unacceptable and to discourage students from interacting with such people.”

But if the watchlist is aimed to intimidate professors who speak out about racism or other forms of systemic oppression, it hasn't worked. “If it is ‘leftist propaganda’ to talk about the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant, to talk about justice and love for God and neighbor, to talk about humility and grace—in short, to talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ,” wrote listed Calvin College professor Joe Kuilema (sojo.net/calvin) “then let us do it all the louder.”



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Veterans confront a police line at Standing Rock in North Dakota.

Stephanie Keith/Reuters

Changing the Rules of Engagement

AS WE ENTER this new Trumpish world, I've been thinking a lot about civil disobedience. I had the honor of delivering the first lecture in honor of the late Jonathan Schell two nights after the election, and used the occasion to reflect on his masterwork *Unconquerable World*, with its confident belief that the era of violence was passing and that

corporate power and shabby oligarchy. It's also a galloping incivility, the verbal violence and crudity that marked Trump's campaign and his days of preparing for the presidency. It's the "alt-right" ugliness of Breitbart's white nationalism; it's the constant barrage of nasty tweets. None of it looks like anything we've seen before from a president, and all of it, whether by design or not, hacks at the bonds that hold us together as a nation.

If we respond to that in kind—with the same sort of anger and snarl—then we play into the hands of the Steve Bannons of the world. They're always going to be better at it, just as they're always going to have more weapons.

SO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE has two purposes in our day. One is the traditional goal of resistance, and so we will need to use our bodies to block deportations and pipelines.

But the other is the resurrection of a society with some dignity. We have to remind our nation what it looks like to turn the other cheek, not with resignation but with courageous calm. By speaking with their sacrifice, *satyagrahis* (nonviolent truth seekers, ala Gandhi) remind us what it means to be fully human and fully engaged.

At its most powerful, civil disobedience changes the atmosphere. It may not convince the active oppressors to change their ways, but it can shift the zeitgeist. And not just around the issues, but around the way we pursue those ends.

Watching the valiant stand of the military veterans who came to Standing Rock to form a human shield around Native Americans was a reminder of the possibilities. These were people trained in violence, who chose instead a non-violent path. Not just because it made tactical sense in the short run, but because it helped transform our sense of the whole issue. Instead of turning the focus to a battle with the police, they were able to turn it back into the deep injustices of American history. They did a little healing.

We don't know how bad the Trump years will be. But the more beautiful our response is, the more powerful it will be. You can't win a wrestling match with people who grew up on WWE. That's why we've got to change the rules of engagement. ■

Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.



You can't win a wrestling match with people who grew up on WWE.

nonviolent action was the right way for the "active many" to beat the "ruthless few."

This jibes with my own experience of the last few years. Helping to organize big protests like the ones that launched the Keystone pipeline fight, or watching in admiration as friends galvanized the country around Standing Rock, has convinced me that these techniques continue to represent our best tools for change.

On the one hand, disobedience may be harder in the Trump era—it may come at a higher price, as the zealot officials he's appointed crack down.

But civil disobedience may also be more important than ever, especially the civil part. Because what we are battling now is not just

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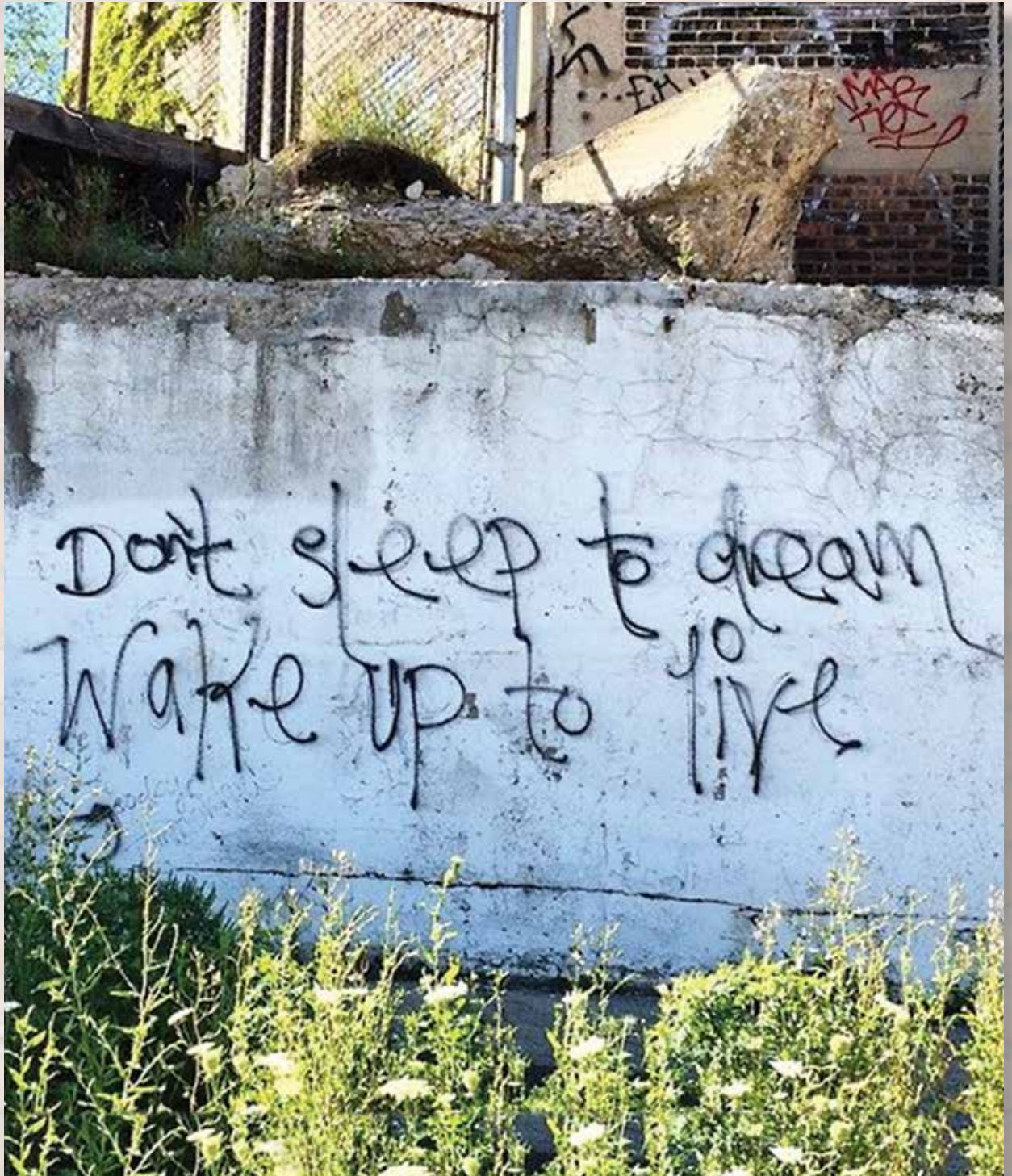
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THE WRITING'S



ON THE WALL

**Sometimes the best textbook for learning can
be found by walking through city neighborhoods
with open eyes • by MARCIA GOOD**

“The walls are the publishers of the poor.” —Eduardo Galeano

She had a simple assignment. Walk into the botánica, buy something small, and at minimum exchange greetings with Doña Victoria, the owner who knew she would be seeing random students from DePaul University in Chicago, where I teach, coming in during the week.

But the student sat outside on a bench, pretending to text instead. Why? She admitted that she hesitated going in “for reasons I’m not very proud of”—there were four people on the street, all of them older than her and speaking Spanish, a language she didn’t understand. Three of them had tattoos and piercings. Was she encroaching on their neighborhood? Would that be considered offensive?

When you feel scared and intimidated, what do you do next? She busied herself in her phone until she thought they were gone, and then entered the store.

Later, she wrote:

So I went in, only to discover they were inside as well. I quietly went to look at candles, hoping no one would talk to me. However, the lady I wrote about to the class—the mother who had come to ask Doña Victoria for a prayer of protection for her son, the woman who helped me pick out a candle and patiently answer all of my questions—was the same woman I had avoided outside of the store. She was so willing to help a complete stranger who was so obviously not from the area that I felt incredibly guilty for judging based on her appearance.

Even though I am well aware this entire story sounds like something out of one of those “Chicken Soup for the Soul” books for preteens



All artwork is from various neighborhoods in Chicago, photographed by Marcia Good.

"EDUCATION IS NOT AN ACT OF CONSUMING IDEAS



A photographic image of Harriet Tubman.

that teach lessons of cultural acceptance, volunteering for good, creating lasting friendships, etc., everything is completely true and the significance is only becoming apparent as I reflect back. I witnessed the blessing of candles for long-lasting love and safety from violence that day. I also walked away with a unique experience and new impression of Humboldt Park. No other neighborhood that I visited welcomed a complete stranger with such open arms.

Students are so often afraid when I ask them to go to the main street in Humboldt Park, "Paseo Boricua," the heart of a Puerto Rican neighborhood on Chicago's west side. They are assigned to take a bus, look for mural art, stop in at a restaurant or coffee shop, buy something within their price range (which can be a dollar for a few tomatoes), and exchange simple pleasantries with sales people.

Some female students write that their uncles, fathers, and boyfriends protest that the assignment is not safe. Other students post reports of violence in Chicago two miles away, insisting it is the same area. Some Latino students had families who moved out of these neighborhoods years ago, and their parents protest them going back. Even the statistics of how crime has dropped in the neighborhood, or how hundreds of students have done these assignments over the years without incident, do not allay their fears.

But the students, most of them, do the assignment. And we talk about how the word "safety" is so often code for racial fears.

A CONVERSATION ON THE WALLS

"Education is not an act of consuming ideas but of creating them." The words come from a banner across the top

of my course site. What does it mean to put the tools of "creating" ideas into student hands?

Students get a simple assignment at the beginning of the course. I ask them to walk for a few blocks around their homes and take pictures of the "scriptorial landscape" they find.

The first week, we think about "street literacy," looking at the world of writing that goes on in public spaces that is meant to be seen by many and understood by few. Street art and graffiti are in a language of images and script that are supposed to be seen but also to obscure the meanings from most people. It is much more ephemeral and intangible than what resides in libraries. But paying attention provokes us into considering why people write and communicate through symbols and what that means for the human differences that coalesce in urbanscapes.

Before students head out to the streets, they read a short article that critically examines the dichotomies we create about whether graffiti is "art" or "crime." Some students—without even looking in their own neighborhood—take off for areas they consider more run down or "gritty" than their own and come back triumphantly with pictures of work they consider "gang graffiti." It is almost always simple tagging, piecing, or "throw ups." In all the years I've given this assignment, less than 10 percent of students find actual gang graffiti, but most of them think that they have.

Very few know that gang graffiti is communicative—letters written over letters, turned upside down, colors thrown on someone else's colors, symbolic meaning

BUT OF CREATING THEM.”



encoded in the curves of the lines. A conversation is happening on those walls—and just because one is unaware of its presence does not mean there is silence.

Some students share their surprise that a few-block walk in their own neighborhood easily nets them at least 10 photos. Sometimes we are lucky enough to have a student who has actually done some street art, and they find out to their surprise that they have skills and knowledge that give them an advantage in the discussion board. Someone wrote something on a wall with an intention. Whether or not one agrees with that intent, I argue to the students, you should still be able to “see” it.

By far the greatest response to this exercise is surprise that the unofficial and unsanctioned “writing on the wall” exists at all. Most students have been walking by the scriptorial landscape of the city on a daily basis and have never even seen it. They are astonished at this discovery, and it shapes the rest of the course. What does it mean to not see what is right in front of us? Is it an inconvenient truth? Why is it invisible? Who wrote those words, and why do we consider their effort unimportant and insignificant?

This sets the base for the next part of the course, where students explore the concept of the “imagined community” by going on quests to find print newspapers in languages they cannot speak or read. Where do you go to find a newspaper you cannot read? What can you learn by leafing through a newspaper with words you cannot comprehend?

We contemplate the role of the *Chicago Defender* in making space for black journalism, and the role of the

newspaper in the great migrations to Chicago in the early part of the 20th century. Many of the students did not even know that there were migrations of African Americans into Chicago during and after the world wars. We face what we cannot read on the walls, and we face the many languages we cannot understand in the newspaper communities that still exist in Chicago.

A DEEPER KIND OF KNOWLEDGE

Once students are sensitized by experiences like these, we go on to contemplate various issues in the segregated city of Chicago:

Deindustrialization. Students are encouraged to find buildings that are empty, photograph them, learn their history, and describe it to the rest of the class. They find empty factories where workers used to pour in and out of the buildings—buildings such as the old Brach’s factory and the abandoned Cook County Hospital, given over to those who seek illegal shelter and urban explorers photographing their empty, echoing hallways. They see silent smoke stacks. They read Loïc Wacquant’s *Urban Outcasts* and the story of North Lawndale, and think about how entire neighborhoods lost jobs and economic opportunities. They learn how building owners, developers, and real estate agents worked together to build equity for certain populations while other populations were divested of their wealth; white neighborhoods in the suburbs built equity and sent their children to college, black neighborhoods created by restrictive covenants and redlining lost their equity.

SCRIPTS—PARTICULARLY THE SCRIPTS OF ‘OTHERS’



Gentrification. What happens when developers and real estate people turn back to those same neighborhoods and start investing again, after the wealth was drained out? I have students walk through neighborhoods that have a deep history of protesting gentrification. They read the signs, the walls, the newspapers. They read Jesse Mumm’s article on “intimate segregation,” eat in the restaurants and watch who moves around whom, who talks to whom in restaurants. Who are the regulars? They learn to ask the hard questions about what it means when poor neighborhoods become homes for artists, activists, students, and those who seek cheap cultural literacy among the disenfranchised, displacing the very people who made those neighborhoods attractive to them.

Transnationalism. What does it mean to belong to several parts of the world at once? We look at this by walking through Little Village and contemplating how expenditures in the neighborhood, dollar by dollar, make this Mexican neighborhood one of the largest contributors to Chicago’s tax base (second only to the Magnificent Mile). Students go by foot, walking step by step down 26th Street, entering grocery stores, window shopping, writing down the names of businesses. This builds critical awareness of the economic power of immigrants better than reading any book or article.

Walking the city like this helps students attain a deeper kind of knowledge that cannot be achieved just by reading—especially if they are reading with music in their ears, movies in the background, attending to constant

notifications from social media and surrounded by household and dorm sounds.

THE END OF THE PRINTING PRESS ERA?

For generations, the printing press has shaped the book and our ways of learning. The printing press lies at the core of this—able to spit out pamphlet after pamphlet, book after book, and map after map, making possible a commonality of knowing.

The printing press, embedded in the culture of the guilds, built universities filled with books—institutions that reward those who read, write, and interpret them. Scholars, known by the size of their libraries, read the same books and come together (and split asunder, as they are known to do) with their interpretations. They fill reams of paper in journals and books—such is the measure of a scholar.

We are entering a world in which reading a book is no longer the primary technology available to thinkers and seekers of knowledge. Students, all except the most perfectly domesticated, often spend more time on image-filled blogs and relationally defined social media. The “imagined community” joined together by books and shaped by the printing press is no longer the village square of knowledge. We are moving from a build-knowledge society to a knowing-how-to-find-it-and-share-it society. Ideally, we are also learning how to process and apply it. Perhaps, in this, we are still very young.

Our world is “written upon”—everywhere—far beyond the reaches of institutionally sanctioned text. It is not that our students no longer read; it is that their eyes are almost completely colonized by the requirement to

—ARE OFTEN MORE COMPLEX THAN THEY SEEM.



read in other forms—billboards, advertisements, maps, directions, and social media. Cyberspace is also about text, but it is much deeper and richer than simple text. Images, color, design, and sound shape the interactive and communicative environment.

HOW TO MISUNDERSTAND THE “OTHER”

Diego de Landa was an infamous bishop in the 16th century who thought he had learned how to write the Maya language. He was on a crusade to convert the “Indians” of Mesoamerica to Christianity, and he ordered hundreds of Maya books destroyed. “We found a large number of books,” Landa wrote, “and as they contained nothing in which there was not to be seen superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all, which [the Maya] regretted to an amazing degree, and which caused them much affliction.”

Landa, in his passionate pursuit to root out all “evil,” frenetically learned all he could about the Maya. He was recalled to Spain because his fellow priests thought his cruelty excessive and his zeal harmful. He waited for years for his audience with the king, and during that time he wrote a book about the Maya (*Relacion de las cosas de Yucatan*) to convince the king how much cultural information he had amassed and how deeply he understood the Maya. The book is the earliest record of the Maya aside from their own writings, which outsiders did not understand until recent decades. In a tragic irony that is all too common, Landa’s book is a widely used primary source on all things Maya.

Why is this story important to graffiti and to our

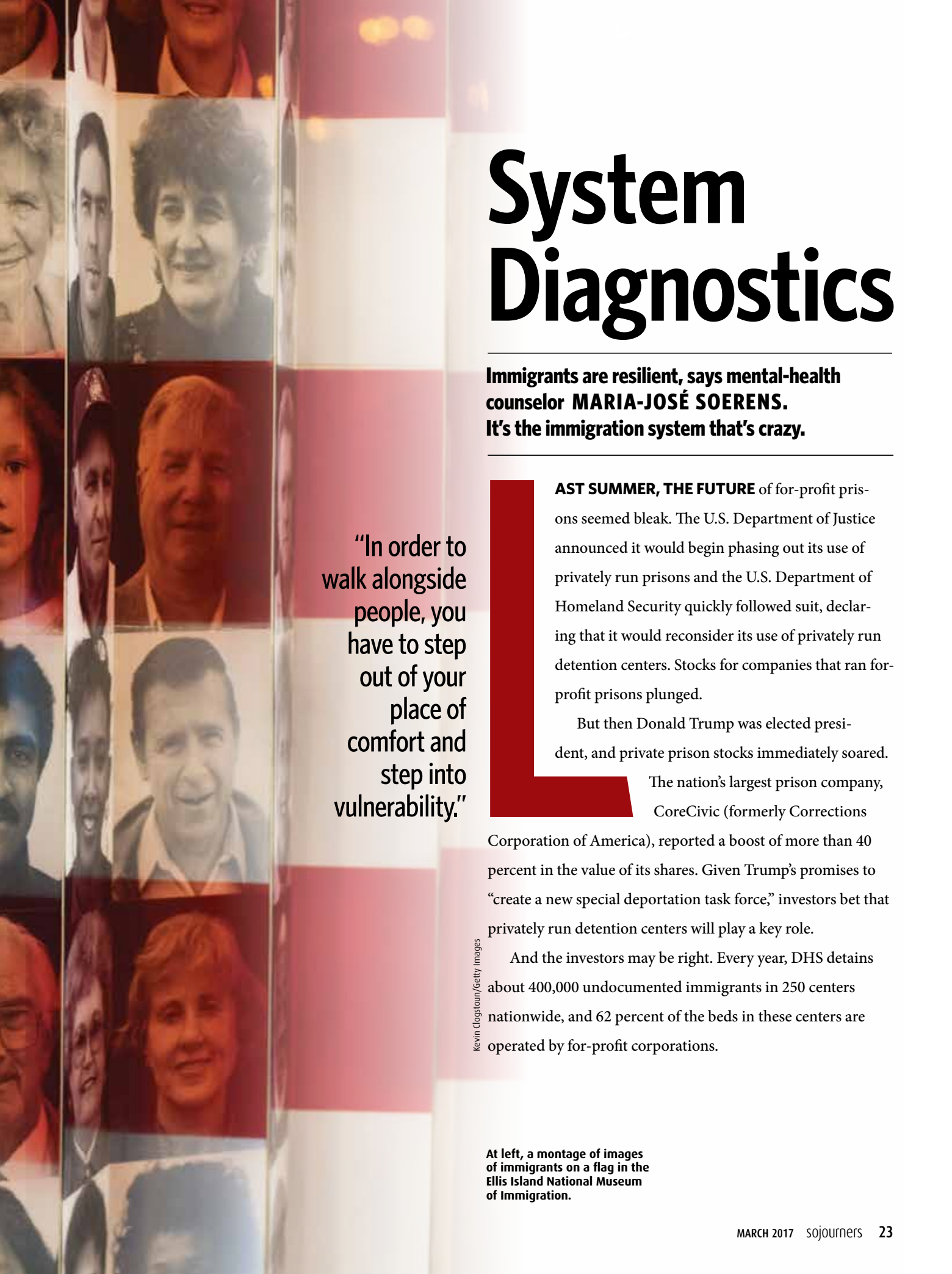
thinking about street literacy? Landa believed he discovered the key to the Maya writing system. This was quite advanced thinking for his day—until then, researchers thought about Maya writing as simple pictures, at a much lower level than symbolic and abstract writing. Landa sat down with Maya scribes and asked them to write the glyphs for an “A,” a “B,” and so on, using the Roman alphabet. He did not ask anyone to write the Maya glyphs for phonemes such as “Ba,” “Be,” “Bi,” “Bo,” and “Bu.” They answered his questions and wrote down what he wanted, but his questions were a great example of “seeing with his own eyes and hearing with his own ears”—it turns out that the Maya glyphs are written more like syllables than letters. He was a captive of his own script, the Roman alphabet, and his book made the rest of outside understanding of Maya script stall out for almost 400 years.

Scripts are often more complex than they seem. Particularly the scripts of “others” considered barbaric or uncivilized or in need of conversion (in Landa’s case) and dismissed as scribbles and erased—buffed by city paint and obliterated. What does it mean when we restrict the reading of the streets to the commercial and sanctioned use of the walls?

How can we begin to “see” the informal, unsanctioned, and often-illegal scriptorial landscapes on the walls of city streets and elsewhere? A small first step is to admit our own illiteracy. ■

Marcia Good is senior professional lecturer of anthropology at DePaul University in Chicago.





System Diagnostics

Immigrants are resilient, says mental-health counselor MARIA-JOSÉ SOERENS. It's the immigration system that's crazy.

"In order to walk alongside people, you have to step out of your place of comfort and step into vulnerability."

LAST SUMMER, THE FUTURE of for-profit prisons seemed bleak. The U.S. Department of Justice announced it would begin phasing out its use of privately run prisons and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security quickly followed suit, declaring that it would reconsider its use of privately run detention centers. Stocks for companies that ran for-profit prisons plunged.

But then Donald Trump was elected president, and private prison stocks immediately soared.

The nation's largest prison company, CoreCivic (formerly Corrections Corporation of America), reported a boost of more than 40 percent in the value of its shares. Given Trump's promises to "create a new special deportation task force," investors bet that privately run detention centers will play a key role.

And the investors may be right. Every year, DHS detains about 400,000 undocumented immigrants in 250 centers nationwide, and 62 percent of the beds in these centers are operated by for-profit corporations.

Kevin Clogston/Getty Images

At left, a montage of images of immigrants on a flag in the Ellis Island National Museum of Immigration.

According to Maria-José Soerens, a licensed mental-health counselor serving undocumented immigrants in Seattle, there are two major problems with for-profit detention centers. First, for-profit centers are not held accountable to the standards that govern federally run centers. In her work in these centers, Soerens has heard complaints ranging from a lack of medical attention to inadequate opportunities for parent-child visitation; one young woman who was having suicidal thoughts was kept in solitary confinement until she told guards she was “better.”



Maria-José Soerens

Sojourners: Why do you focus on the mental health of undocumented immigrants?

Maria-José Soerens: When it comes to the undocumented, you cannot separate their mental health from their political location. Immigration status determines all aspects of your daily life: who you can talk to, access to health, job security, and the constant fear of being separated from your parents or your children.

All of that is stressful on a daily basis, right? Yet there's countless research that has shown that new immigrants, particularly Latinos, and people of color in general, do not use mental-health services.

But the deepest problem, explains Soerens, is that most detention centers only exist because corporations saw a “business opportunity.” Beginning in the early 2000s, for-profit prison companies successfully lobbied Congress to expand drastically the number of beds in the immigration detention system—a move that doubled the revenue of the two largest for-profit prison companies. In 1998, there were 14,000 beds available for immigrant detention; today, there are 34,000.

“This is why it's interesting to be a therapist working within the immigration system,” Soerens told *Sojourners*. “The insanity is in the immigration system, not in the people. The people are gifts.”

This philosophy—immigrants are gifts, not problems—led Soerens to found Puentes, a nonprofit in Seattle with an innovative approach to helping undocumented immigrants “cope and flourish despite our broken immigration system.” *Sojourners* associate editor Betsy Shirley talked with Soerens about the intersections of undocumented immigrants, mental health, and faith—and what this means for the church in the U.S.

Why not? Experts talk about barriers such as price of services and location, which are true. But we don't really reflect on how our model and our assumptions are just not relevant to the people who are not using our services.

What do you mean by “models and assumptions”? Every science operates under assumptions. In psychology, we forget that our scientific knowledge is an expression of a particular cultural tradition. For example, there is a strong European tradition in psychology that suggests that a primary human impulse is to “seek meaning.” When you work with immigrants, you see that what many of them look for is not necessarily meaning—they've got the meaning; indeed, they see signs and wonders everywhere; they are a very religious crowd. According to some anthropologists, many immigrants see crossing the border as a faith journey.

Instead, what immigrants are seeking is liberation. But as a community of professionals, we don't know how to address that; it's not built into psychology. So we're trying to recapture the tradition of liberation psychology from Latin America.

What's liberation psychology? Liberation psychology developed out of liberation theology in El Salvador in the 1980s, in

“Everybody’s voice needs to be heard because there’s a lot of wisdom among us, especially among the oppressed.”

the context of the Salvadoran war. Drawing on that tradition, at Puentes we choose to look at “the Latino” as a valid dialogue partner. Usually in public health they are looked at as a problem to be solved; people say things like, “Oh, there’s such high drug use” or “There’s so much domestic violence” or “If we teach them the right information, they’re going to change and be happy.”

A psychologist at the University of Oregon said that the biggest challenge for psychologists is to attract minorities to the clinic. But at Puentes we recognize that we don’t need to attract people and educate them and colonize them with our frameworks on mental health; instead, we need to look at people as serious dialogue partners and see what resources their community already has.

Okay, so using that framework, what resources does the immigrant community have for coping with oppression?

One of them is solidarity. I’ve seen more than 300 people, and I can count with my fingers the ones who have actually gone to talk to our counselor, much less who have stayed in a therapeutic process. But most of them, if not all of them—what they really want to do is participate in the liberation of the community.

How is that a mental health resource?

What I have found through my own experience and working with other people in *la lucha* [the struggle] is that community organizing, political organizing, and community development are avenues that help people to change their conditions but also get to know themselves. Leadership development is tremendously important as a tool of self-knowledge—knowing one’s own story, knowing one’s own value, and, as one of my mentors often says, healing the scars of lifelong oppression.

So as a psychologist, what’s your role in this liberation? I try to understand their personal agenda: What do they want, and how can I mobilize resources to help them achieve their goals? I want my clients to learn that that they are not alone, they matter, and that we can work together.

Could you give me an example of what this looks like? A woman I worked with, I’ll call her “Maria,” was a victim of domestic violence here in the U.S. At the time she did not have access to resources—she was living under a bridge with her children. I was doing an evaluation for Maria, and during the interview she tells me, “I just don’t want anybody to have to go through that. So I want to become a *promotora de salud* [a lay community-health advocate], just like my mother [in Mexico].”

So I said to her, “Okay, Maria. Let’s do it. How do we mobilize the resources for you to do what you need to do?” Let’s look at this clinically: Maria’s experience is that no one has ever cared for her. In her words: “Nothing works out for me ever.” In fact, her U Visa [a visa for victims of crimes] was rejected.

After we talked with Maria’s attorneys, we started some community organizing to get Maria’s U Visa application reconsidered. And when Maria says, “Nothing ever works out for me,” we tell her, “No, Maria, we’re going to do it, you are not alone. We care. You’re part of a movement.”

At the same time, Maria is being trained as a health promoter, because she wants to help other women. So we don’t see Maria as a victim of domestic violence or a client that we’re helping; we see her—in all her glory—as a tremendous resource to the community.

Are there times when medical intervention is necessary?

We need to think about levels here: For people who are struggling with schizophrenia and psychosis, there are tools for them in the clinic—they need medication and treatment. But there’s a whole spectrum of people who have chronic post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety, who could benefit much more from the support of a strong community around them.

How does your faith inform your work as a psychologist?

My faith invites me to look at systems from the narrative of resistance. And when you look at American psychology from the narrative of resistance, it’s very easy to see how the technique has been detached, disengaged, and comfortable: You do your notes, you care about HIPAA laws, liability,

and the main focus of your practice is not to ever get sued.

But in order to walk alongside people, you have to step out of your place of comfort and step into vulnerability. For me, being vulnerable looks like being an expert witness in an immigration court—it’s basically like defending a dissertation repeatedly. I’m very uncomfortable and I want to cry every time I’m there. But that’s where faith comes in.

What would it mean if Christians in the U.S. recognized immigrants as dialogue partners?

It would mean seeing them as legitimate neighbors and protecting them and their families. It was devastating to learn that an overwhelming percentage of white evangelicals voted a man into office who vowed to deport 2 million people on day one. As a country we chose to jeopardize the safety of millions of families who are part of our community and who are now being persecuted and separated. We will see the consequences of our actions in the mental health of an entire generation of children who are growing up in fear.

This is an area where the church needs to come together and make an important decision: Will we work at the service of our fear or at the service of Jesus, who tells us to love our neighbor, and also, that we are one body? If Christians recognize this—that immigrants are part of our own body, that what is done to them is done to us—we will be able to come together and defend families in our communities.

Lately, my Facebook feed has been plastered with—and I apologize—privileged Christians whining about how the church has failed them. And then I go to the detention center in Tacoma [Wash.], which is like any detention center: very oppressive conditions, daily human rights violations. But the faith there is *alive*; people believe that God is showing up for them and they get together to do Bible study. And I’m thinking: The church in North America needs to hear you.

So that’s what it means to me to see people as a serious dialogue partner. It’s not necessarily for their own sake, it’s for the sake of everybody. Everybody’s voice needs to be heard because there’s a lot of wisdom among us—and this is where my liberation theology comes up—especially among the oppressed. ■

We can't end violent extremism with more violence.

by **CHARLES KWUELUM**

LONG BEFORE Boko Haram emerged in 2002, my home country of Nigeria was polarized along religious and ethnic lines by politicians who sought to pit one group against another. Disputes about religious freedom, resource control, and citizenship led to violent conflicts at the local and state levels. Many religious sites were desecrated.

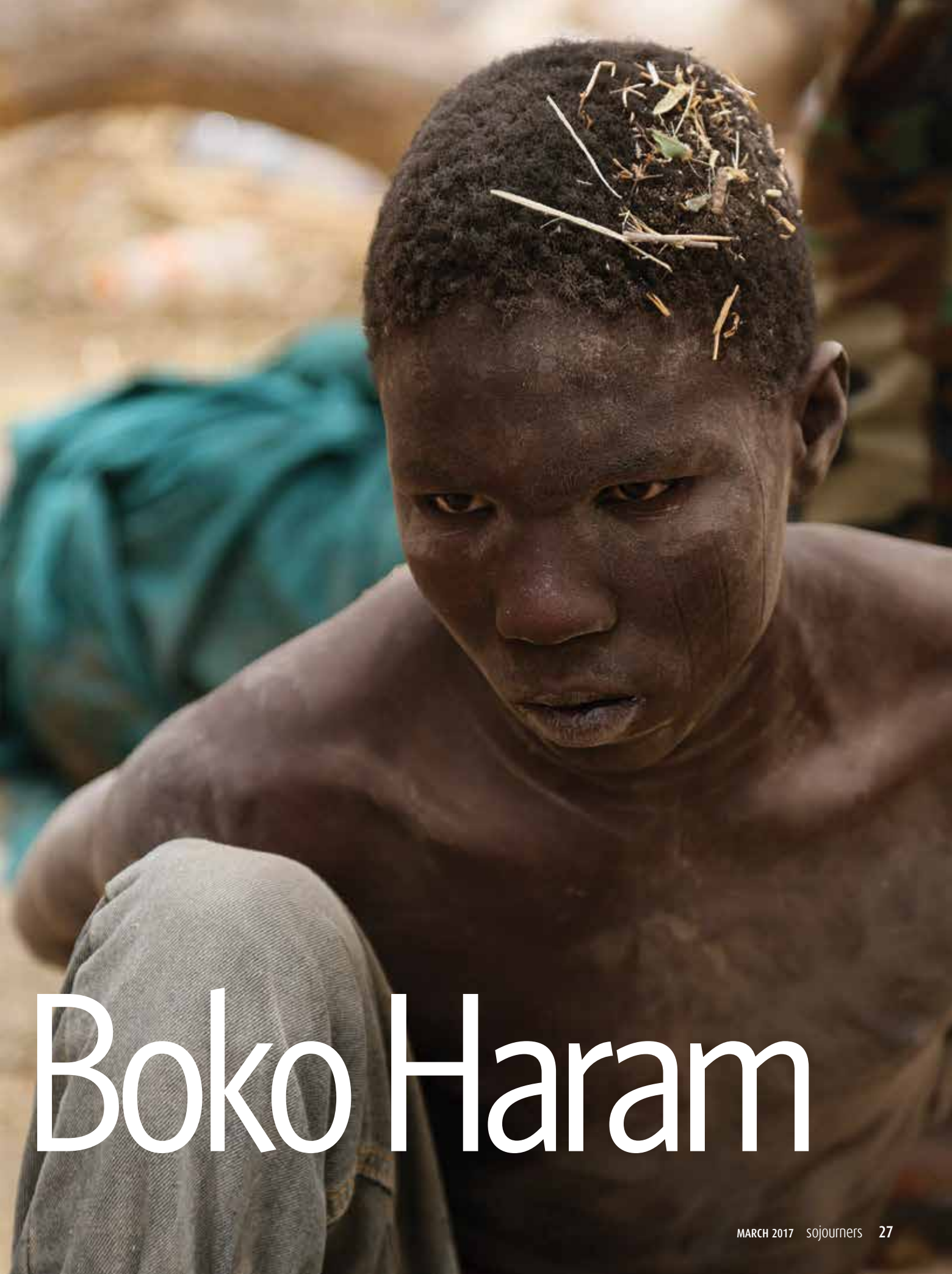
Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and seventh most populous worldwide, is fondly referred to as “the giant of West Africa.” It has the largest economy on the continent and is incredibly diverse in ethnicity and religion. Half of Nigeria’s population is Christian, living mostly in the southern part of the country, and the other half is Muslim, living primarily in the north.

In 2009, while I was pastor of a Catholic parish in Kano State, in northern Nigeria, a bloody confrontation broke out between the Nigeria Police Force and Boko Haram about 300 miles away in the northeast part of the country. Two years later, I was caring for eight families who had fled to the city of Kaduna, seeking safety from Boko Haram attacks. As I listened to their stories, I could not help but think of my own family’s displacement after riots in 1980 and 2002. Our congregation and my own family had been directly impacted by violent ethno-religious conflicts.

Emmanuel Braun/Reuters

A young prisoner suspected of membership in Boko Haram sits in a field base of Chadian soldiers in Gambaru, Nigeria.

My Neighbor,



Boko Haram

But the norm in the part of northern Nigeria where I grew up was very different from that. Christians and Muslims lived together as neighbors and friends. Young people bonded as they played sports with one another. Muslims and Christians exchanged greetings and attended one another's naming and marriage ceremonies. We rejoiced and grieved together.

This included Nasiru, Ahmad, and Abdul, three of my Muslim neighbors who joined Boko Haram in 2009. They were attracted to Boko Haram because of their frustration with overwhelming socioeconomic inequality that had left them impoverished and unemployed. From their perspective, the ostentatious lifestyle of the political class indicated corruption, poor governance, and improperly managed resources. Boko Haram seemed to promise justice.

"We feel hopeful when the preacher reminds us that those who rob us of our livelihood will be judged and damned," I remember Nasiru saying to me.

Birth of Boko Haram

Though it gained global attention in 2014 for the kidnapping of more than 270 schoolgirls, Boko Haram did not begin as a terrorist group. In 2002, Mohammed Yusuf, a native of northern Nigeria, formed a movement called Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad, or "The Group of the People of Sunna for Preaching and Struggle." Based on their cult-like following of Yusuf, they were more commonly known as the Yusufiyya Movement. The group had an aggressive attitude toward corrupt and indecent behaviors and a stated passion to create a more just society.

The sect was inspired by the teachings and works of a 13th century scholar, Ibn Taymiyya, a staunch defender of Sunni Islam based on strict adherence to the Quran and the Sunna, or practices, of the

Prophet Muhammad. Like Ibn Taymiyya, Yusuf believed that the Quran and the Sunna contained all the religious and spiritual guidance necessary for salvation in the hereafter. Many Sunni scholars disagree with this philosophy and refute the group's identity as Islamic.

Eventually the group came to be known as Boko Haram, a combination of Hausa and Arabic words referring to the group's constant warnings to Muslims about the dangers of Western education. Following the implementation of sharia, the Islamic legal system, in several northern Nigerian states in the early 2000s, Boko Haram sought to further expand sharia throughout the country. To this day, politicians in Nigeria's National Assembly still try to pass bills mandating sharia.

After Yusuf's death in 2009, the group was reorganized into a more militant movement by Abubakar Shekau, who declared the group's affiliation with al Qaeda. Later the group announced its allegiance to ISIS, the so-called Islamic State.

From neighbors to "terrorists"

The impact of Boko Haram's actions has been terrible, including kidnappings, abuse of women and girls, suicide bombings, and thousands of injuries and deaths. Data collected by the Church of the Brethren reveals numbers far higher than those in conventional media reports, with as many as 40,000 people killed and more than 2,000 people abducted, including the girls taken from the Chibok school in 2014.

The Nigerian government and the international community have responded in various ways, most of them militarized. In no small part due to Nigeria's strategic and economic importance, in November 2013 the U.S. government designated Boko Haram and its splinter group, Ansaru, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. The U.S. claims the designation is part of its effort to help Nigeria adopt a comprehensive approach to

its domestic terrorist threat. In May 2014, the U.N. Security Council followed suit, adding Boko Haram to its list of al Qaeda affiliates subject to targeted sanctions.

The decision to label members of Boko Haram as "terrorists" immediately fractured fragile interfaith relationships like the ones I had experienced in Kano State. Such relationships in communities throughout the country were the basis for any kind of sustainable interfaith exchange and were foundational for a future without violence.

Suddenly those who had been friendly neighbors for many years were designated as terrorists. Mistrust, suspicion, fear, intolerance, and dehumanization seeped into existing relationships.

Countering violent extremism

The U.S. State Department says that "countering violent extremism" is a critical part of a comprehensive, sustainable counterterrorism strategy that addresses the entire life cycle of radicalization. This includes addressing the conditions that make communities susceptible to violent extremism, such as poverty, high unemployment, and lack of educational opportunities.

While a step in the right direction, the U.S. carries out these development activities as part of a military and security strategy, often blurring the lines between military and development, thus undermining peacebuilding work.

According to Gordon Adams, a national security budget expert, the U.S. spends at least \$100 billion annually on global counterterrorism efforts and likely more, as some costs are classified. The countries fighting Boko Haram—Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Benin—together have received more than \$156 million worth of training and weaponry, including military planes and light attack jets with mounted machine guns, to support efforts against Boko Haram.

But it's not all "free." Nigeria has had

'An enemy is one whose

to invest significant resources of its own to purchase ammunition and other military hardware, leading to substantial debt. Nigeria's president, Muhammadu Buhari, recently requested approval from the Nigerian Senate to borrow \$30 billion, the highest request of its kind in Nigeria's history.

A counterproductive response

There are other problems with this military response. Like Boko Haram, the Nigerian military has been credibly accused of human rights abuses and the use of child soldiers, as well as corruption and a lack of accountability. There are also concerns about the Civilian Joint Task Force, a local militia group in northeast Nigeria that has taken law enforcement into its own hands.

In December 2015, President Buhari announced that the war against Boko Haram "technically" had been won. Despite this claim, Boko Haram controls territories in the northeastern part of the country and continues to engage in reprisal attacks against the military. Killings, kidnappings, and human rights abuses, including abuse targeting women and girls, have also increased in the last two years. Suicide bombers attacked camps of displaced people at Dikwa and Dalori in February 2016, and Boko Haram forces engaged in a large-scale assault at Mallam Fatori in September. Dozens of soldiers remain missing after an attack on a military base at Gashigar village in October. As Boko Haram comes under increasing military pressure, it continues to adapt and rebound.

But increased violence isn't the only consequence of military action; the fighting has also brought about a humanitarian crisis. The military's tactic of forcing communities to relocate to military-controlled camps has caused food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, and increased violations of human rights.

In mid-2016, the United Nations reported that 99 percent of the 1.7 million

people displaced in northeastern Nigeria have been driven from their homes by the insurgency. Another 155,000 Nigerians have become refugees in neighboring Cameroon, Niger, and Chad.

After an attack on a humanitarian convoy in July 2015, the United Nations suspended aid, leading to more hunger and malnutrition. The humanitarian organization UNICEF estimates that health crises and famine resulting from the insurgency and counterterrorism attacks could lead to 75,000 children's deaths in Nigeria in 2017.

Hearing our enemies

I do not know what happened to Nasiru, Ahmad, and Abdul, my neighbors in Wudil who joined Boko Haram. In 2009 the state ordered the mosque in our town to be demolished; in retaliation, Christian communities began receiving threats from Boko Haram, warning us not to worship on Sundays anymore. Later, the military began a door-to-door search, forcing members of Boko Haram, including my neighbors, to flee to northeast Nigeria. No trace of them or their families is feasible.

"Why are they killing us?" Narisu, Ahmad, and Abdul asked me before they left. "They should listen to us because we are not killers." Their words remind me of a saying popularized by Quaker peacebuilder Gene Knudsen Hoffman: "An enemy is one whose story we have not heard." Nonviolence that transforms violent extremist ideology is undoubtedly a greater power in the long run than military interventions.

A huge gap remains between policy perceptions about how to combat the violent extremism of Boko Haram and the realities on the ground. Reports from organizations such as Human Rights Watch indicate that the government's heavy-handed, militarized response—characterized by human rights violations of its own—has proved counterproductive. In a recent study commissioned

by the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, the International Dialogue Centre, and Finn Church Aid, former members of Boko Haram said that "'pitiless' military action and the need to take revenge" ultimately "helped tip them over the edge" in deciding to join Boko Haram.

Since December 2011, the more militarized approach has led to an ever-increasing cycle of violence, with the civilian population suffering as a result. It has also disrupted the possibility of building trust and finding a healthy truce between the government and Boko Haram.

Strategies to counter Boko Haram should be based on research about the best constructive, nonviolent mechanisms to dissuade agents of extremism—mechanisms more likely to promote tolerance and encourage resistance to recruitment, radicalization, and indoctrination.

Is it possible to reach a healthy, long-term, just, and peaceful resolution in the midst of a cycle of counterattacks and gross human rights abuses from both Boko Haram and Nigeria's military? If a peaceful, sustainable way forward is to be found, both Nigeria and the U.S. must redirect the huge resources invested in weaponry to more robust, life-saving humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.

The prophet Isaiah wrote, "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4). This is the source of my hope for a just peace and the well-being of *all* my neighbors, in Kano State and beyond. ■

Charles Kwuelum is a legislative associate for international affairs at Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office. He leads workshops, writes, and speaks about U.S. policy on Africa, food security, and global HIV/AIDS.

story we have not heard.'

The Internet Endureth

... and what that means for Christian forgiveness.

by KATE OTT

FRANTICALLY GRABBING last-minute items, I rush out the door to get my middle-school son to his pregame warm-up. “Oh, don’t rush; it will only take us 25 minutes to get there,” says my son. Surprised, I question where he got that information. Looking up from his phone, he replies, “Google sent a notification on my phone since my calendar has the game with location.” With some marvel in his tone, he remarks, “Every morning Google Assistant tells me how long it will take the bus to get to school.”

Humans have always shared information with each other, but the advance of digital media altered the time and geographic constraints that once shaped our historical patterns of communication. This transition ended the “Gutenberg era,” a period of human communication marked by a dependency on print, authorship, and fixity, and launched us into an era of communication marked by openness, collaboration, and easy access to information.

Getty Images

Forever ...

delete

Unlike the digital concept of deletion or erasure, the concept of metanoia is not about forgetting.

Despite the rapid pace at which we churn through this information, our new communication styles are also shaped, paradoxically, by permanence. Every share, post, or comment is archived, creating an online trove of information that identifies every person and their connections: where we get our news, what we look like, what sports team or social causes we support, who “likes” our church on Facebook, and, in my son’s case, our current whereabouts, our travel route, and destination points.

The internet is forever

In the world of digital ethics, the “endless memory of the internet” has recently attracted a lot of attention. How do we live in a world that increasingly does not forget?

In response, many digital experts suggested we reclaim the practice of deleting or erasing past data. “Forgetting plays a central role in human decision-making,” writes Viktor Mayer-Schönberger in *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*. “It lets us act in time, cognizant of, but not shackled by, past events.” Without the ability to forget, Mayer-Schönberger argues, individuals and communities are forever tied to past events and may be unable “to live and act firmly in the present.” Sadly, we are all too familiar with reports of teenagers committing suicide over an image or post shared widely or adults losing their career over similar incidents.

Other scholars—including privacy expert Meg Leta Jones, author of *Ctrl+Z: The Right to Be Forgotten*—have argued for stronger legal options that would require material to be deleted and place limits on data collection. Many European countries already have such laws and regulations intended to shorten the internet’s long memory.

Yet Christians must have a different response. While the digital cataloging of our lives often reinforces a notion of stagnation and accumulation, the Christian call is a call of transformation and change. We are an imperfect people striving to live godly lives. Our inevitable failures—including those archived online—require reflection and recalibration on a daily basis. This is both the gift and struggle of Christian life.

And this presents contemporary Christians with complicated questions: As sinful people prone to personal, social, and institutional failures, how do we react to a cultural shift that forever keeps track of those sins? Is deleting information about past mistakes the same as engaging in the practice of confession? And in a world where forgetting has become a luxury, what does Christian forgiveness look like?

Ctrl+Z vs. transformation

When early Christians talked about the ability to radically change one’s life and path, they often used the Greek word “metanoia,” meaning repentance or conversion. Though metanoia translates as a “change of heart/mind,” Christians believed such a change was not just a feeling or a thought, but something lived out through changed actions or reformed behavior—an ongoing process that had to be continuously

reaffirmed with an integrity of belief and practice.

But unlike the digital concept of deletion or erasure, the concept of metanoia is not about forgetting. In fact, the notion of metanoia or repentance requires a truth-filled inventory of how one has behaved in the past and sincere action toward change.

For an example of what metanoia might look like in an age of the endless internet memory, consider the case of former NFL football player Ray Rice. In February 2014, footage was aired from a hotel surveillance camera showing Rice dragging Janay Palmer, his unconscious fiancée (now wife) out of an elevator. Several months later, a second video of the incident, from cameras inside the elevator, was released, showing Rice punching his fiancée in the face. The videos have millions of views on YouTube and were widely shared by news outlets. Public reaction to the footage led the Baltimore Ravens to release Rice, and the NFL suspended him.

What Rice did was inexcusable. He committed an act of domestic violence. It was sin and it was wrong. The footage of Rice’s sin likely will be archived on the internet forever. But in the aftermath, has Rice experienced metanoia? He apologized publicly and pledged to change his behavior. But we know that abusive behavior is a pattern likely to repeat itself without treatment or intervention. Rice has demonstrated activity toward personal change including counseling and outspoken advocacy against domestic violence. With Palmer by his side, he begged media outlets to stop showing the footage, not because he wasn’t guilty, but out of respect for their privacy. Yet Rice doesn’t wish to “delete” his sin from collective memory; he wants to use his story to raise awareness about domestic violence and save others from what Rice describes as his “worst decision.” “I want my story to be told,” said Rice in a 2016 interview. “There’s a lot of detail to it, but I want it to be told. I want to help as many people as I can.”

This is often where Christian discussion of metanoia ends: with individual acts of moving away from sin and toward God. But as theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether reminds us, sin also exists on a communal level, including corporate sins such as racism and sexism in which we all participate unintentionally and often uncritically. For Ruether, metanoia means “we not only have to confront our own sadistic and masochistic tendencies, but also have to unmask the claims of the dominant culture that misleads us about the nature of good and evil.” In other words, if there is both individual and structural sin, there must be both individual and structural conversion.

Ruether’s understanding of metanoia pushes us to look at structural forces at work in Ray Rice’s story: Despite his public apology and apparent changes in behavior, Rice has not returned to the NFL—even though other players have since been convicted of similar crimes and have only been suspended for a single game. Some have argued that Rice hasn’t returned to the NFL because he lacked skill, but we cannot be naïve: In the context of a culture seeking someone to blame for our seeming inability to stop sexualized violence, the viral

The delete key does not and cannot forgive.

footage of Rice provided an easy scapegoat. Furthermore, many sports commentators noted that the racialized depictions of Rice and his relationship evidence deeper issues related to who gets punished for violence against women—not to mention economic and sexist motivations behind the NFL's inability to uphold a zero tolerance policy on domestic and sexual violence. Or as Ruether might say, to the best of our knowledge, Rice has confronted his own sin, but the racism and sexism embedded in the sports industry is alive and well.

I see you seeing me

Back in the early days of the web, writes digital media scholar Lisa Nakamura, “internet utopians claimed the internet would give everyone the power to surveil, to see and not be seen, to become a bodiless and thus unseeable user. Instead, we have become more visible and trackable than ever.” Obviously, this increased visibility isn’t all bad: New technology allows grandparents to meet a new baby via video call, transgender teens to find supportive communities, and Black Lives Matter advocates to organize nonviolent protest—all significant and positive outcomes.

But our visibility on the internet goes beyond the information we actively share. By using services such as smartphones, iTunes, credit cards, Instagram, or search engines, we agree to let these companies collect data from us: the programs we open, links we click, friends we follow, GPS locations we generate, and any personal data we use to create a profile, such as our age, race, or gender. And this data becomes a valuable product that is sold to companies who can tailor a product to your interests or generate the kind of content that keeps you returning. This is partly why social media platforms are designed to invite sharing: The more we share, the more data is generated, and the more profit is made. In other words, the advance of digital culture simultaneously launched an economic system in which businesses seek profit and we seek personal and community connections.

Dataveillance, as this process is called, is often viewed as harmless or at least morally neutral. Yet allowing companies to collect bulk information about ourselves serves particular social structures of power—structures that perpetuate deformed economic and instrumentally driven views of each other and ourselves.

A similar dynamic is at work when we engage with our peers online. As users of social networks, we begin to prize measurement—likes, shares, and followers—over relationship. When we up-vote a Reddit sub-thread, “like” a friend’s post, post only positive feedback, or gang up on comments counter to one’s political views, we participate in a form of social surveillance that often maintains power differences

and reinforces offline inequalities.

But as Ruether reminds us, metanoia happens when we actively disrupt these processes and unmask these distortions of relationship. For example, we might disrupt the use of personal data for economic profit by permanently changing the settings on our web browser, turning off our geo-locators, using search engine services that are not beholden to advertising dollars, or seeking out information rather than accepting only what is in our newsfeed. We can also resist airbrushing our posts in ways that further entrench harmful cultural narratives around race, gender, and economic success; reconsider how we maintain friendship rather than accepting default settings; and resist joining in comment threads to reinforce our own opinion or denigrate another’s. Through these countercultural practices, we can begin to reshape social networks and digital media systems to promote change.



Forgive, not forget

Another example of metanoia in the digital world is the site Fat, Ugly, or Slutty, a user-run gaming site that holds online gamers accountable for their sexist and racist comments and actions. The site publicly posts negative messages women gamers receive, ranging from fat shaming to death threats. In an exchange chronicled by Lisa Nakamura in *Feminist Surveillance Studies*, a male gamer found his name published on the site. He asked to have his information removed, as he says he was young, did something stupid, and would like “to not be reped [represented] in that way.” He also notes that “I learned my lesson.” The site moderator decided to remove his username from the post, but leave the information published, a response that acknowledges the potential for personal transformation but also promotes continued social awareness that such behavior is wrong.

As sinful people our personal, social, and institutional failures go viral and remain archived for future generations to uncover. “To be forgotten” is a luxury in our digital culture—one for which Christians need not strive. Rather, we (and God) are better served by transforming our lives in an ongoing fashion toward practices of justice and mutuality. Metanoia rejects erasure of sin in favor of accountability on personal and systemic levels.

The delete key does not and cannot forgive. But *we* can and *do* in ways that renew and restore relationship with others and God. ■

Kate Ott (kateott.org) is an assistant professor of Christian social ethics at Drew Theological School in Madison, N.J., and author of the forthcoming *Hacking Christian Ethics: The Technology and Ethics of Everyday Living* (Rowman & Littlefield).



Never Found the Body

Since 1998, more than 6,330 people have died crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. The Colibrí Center's mission is to identify the dead and return the remains to their family.



"REMEMBER YOU are dust, and to dust you shall return." Each year the community of Jesus stands at the beginning of the season of Lent and recalls death, mortality, corporeality. We are dust. We are dying. And, as the pastor smears the mark of the cross on the foreheads of the faithful on Ash Wednesday, she says, "Remember you are dust."

Such an awareness is where resurrection hope begins. It must. How can one celebrate resurrection hope without first understanding that we are dust and to dust we shall return? The act of marking ourselves with ashes is not morbid. Such rituals of death and resurrection give witness to God's grace for both the dead and those who love them.

But what happens when there is no body over which to mourn?

In circumstances where a loved one's body is lost, the pain and grief are magnified. A plane disappears over the depths of the waters, and bodies are never found. A person goes missing, and remains are never recovered. Whatever the circumstance, a funeral without a body is almost always a source of extra pain. Not only is a loved one dead, but the ritual act of tending to their body is taken away.

There are people in the United States, Mexico, and Central America who experience such trauma largely because of U.S. border policy. As people die migrating through the desert lands of the southern border of the United States, their bodies are literally returning to dust, and their suffering is largely invisible. Rather than receiving ritual care from family and community at the time of death, these immigrants die alone. Their remains are left in the desert, discovered only by chance.

Background, footprints of immigrants in the Sonoran Desert near the U.S. border. Above, a shoe left along the border.

Randi Lynn Beach

A humanitarian crisis at the border

The Colibrí Center for Human Rights, based in Tucson, Ariz., is a nonprofit seeking justice amid the current failures of immigration and border life. Colibrí describes itself as “a family advocacy nonprofit” that works “with families, forensic scientists, and humanitarians to end migrant death and related suffering on the U.S.-Mexico border.”

When remains are found, Colibrí steps

by staff as they return calls.

Colibrí’s office is across the hallway from the morgue for Pima County, Ariz. “Sometimes it is difficult and a bit strange to work just 20 feet away from a morgue,” said Reineke. “There are sounds, smells, and sights that are disturbing. We face this aspect of our work with care, both for ourselves and for the dead. We take solace in the fact that, at least at this office, [the dead]

and the medico-legal death investigators are searching for a needle in a haystack.

Reineke recounted the day a forensic anthropologist stopped by the Colibrí office to ask if they had any missing person reports for “young men, between 14 and 17 years old, who disappeared two to three years ago.” They ran the search in Colibrí’s database and came up with nearly 50 possibilities.

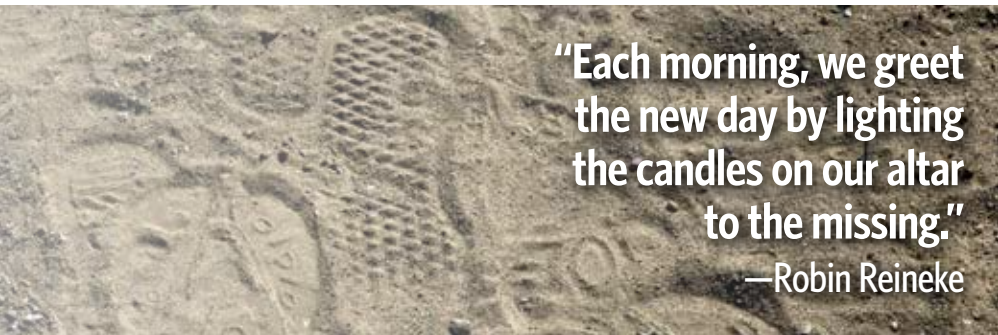
Matches are sometimes difficult. Remains come to the morgue in all kinds of condition, from persons recently deceased to skeletal pieces from a person long dead. What’s more, for those working in the midst of these border deaths, there is always an awareness that many remains are still out there in some remote area of the Sonoran Desert.

Recently Colibrí has begun a new initiative: DNA data. In December 2016, the Colibrí team traveled to parts of the U.S. with large immigrant populations from Mexico and Central America to collect information about missing persons, as well as DNA samples from family members in order to facilitate better opportunities for identifying the dead.

The first collection of DNA samples took place in San Francisco. Over a three-year period, the team will travel to New York, the Carolinas, Sacramento, and Los Angeles to meet family members of the missing and collect DNA samples. The DNA collection will become another tool in Colibrí’s work of identifying the dead and caring for their families.

“Now we have the funding and the relationships to be able to collect DNA from families and compare it directly to the DNA collected from the remains,” Reineke said. These meetings with families of the missing build a connection to people who care for them and for their lost beloved. The time the Colibrí team spends collecting data is, in fact, a moment of human encounter in the midst of suffering. These moments are opportunities to bring grace to bear in situations of trauma and grief.

In 10 years Colibrí has helped identify



“Each morning, we greet the new day by lighting the candles on our altar to the missing.”
—Robin Reineke

in to help. When a loved one goes missing crossing the border going north, Colibrí is a place to check.

In Colibrí’s Missing Migrant Project, a team works with families of the missing to create forensically detailed missing-person reports. Colibrí specializes in collecting often-overlooked details about missing persons: tattoos, unusual physical characteristics, and items they may have been carrying at the time they went missing, including prayer cards, photographs of family members, belt buckles, or other unique belongings. This information is compared to evidence collected by forensic scientists and medical examiners in hopes of identifying the dead.

“Each morning, we greet the new day by lighting the candles on our altar to the missing, and making sure there is sugar water in the hummingbird feeder outside our window,” Robin Reineke, Colibrí’s co-founder and executive director, told *Sojourners*.

The hummingbird, *colibrí* in Spanish, is a symbol of connectivity between the living and the dead in many indigenous cultures of the Americas and is pertinent to the work done in the Colibrí office every day. A typical morning is spent processing voice-mails, emails, and Facebook messages from family members searching for missing relatives. These contacts are logged as part of the missing-person reports that are completed

will be treated with respect, and that everything possible will be done to identify them and return them to their families where they can be properly mourned.”

By developing the first comprehensive system to track and compare missing and unidentified persons on the border, Colibrí is facilitating identifications, providing answers to families of the missing, and informing policy discussion and decision-making.

Since 1998, more than 6,330 people have died crossing the multistate U.S.-Mexico border. Since 2001, more than 2,500 remains have been recovered from the desert in Pima County. More than 900 are unidentified, and the numbers continue to grow. Between January and May 2016, 32 remains were discovered and brought to the Pima County morgue. And in what has become the new normal, the numbers reached record highs in June and July with 24 remains found each month.

“It’s a humanitarian crisis,” said Reineke.

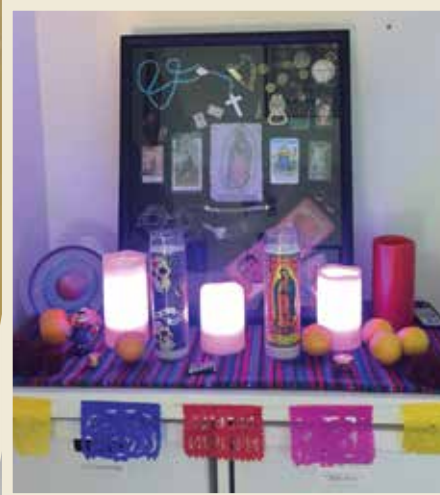
Investigating death with dignity

The work of identifying remains is done largely through the unique missing person reports collected by Colibrí and compared with reports on discovered remains in the medical examiner’s office. As helpful as these extensive missing person reports have been, there is still a sense that the staff of Colibrí



Memorials to the missing inside the Colibrí Center at the Tucson medical examiner's office.

The Colibrí Center developed the first comprehensive system to track and compare missing persons on the U.S.-Mexico border.



In the docudrama *Who Is Dayani Cristal?*, the story of a real-life Honduran migrant who died in the desert, the brother of the deceased asks this question: “As I understand, the United States is investing billions of dollars in that wall. It’s a dead investment. Why invest in something that is inanimate? Why not invest in human beings?” Indeed, the border wall is not just a dead investment, it is a deadly one.

Faith communities

have a unique perspective on migration and the U.S.-Mexico border. We are clear that the only effective solution to the broken, dysfunctional, and deadly immigration system is a comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration law that is compassionate, just, and safe and that recognizes the humanity of migrants who live in the push and pull of the border.

So while fewer migrants are coming through the safe passages, more are coming through the dangerous routes. Desert deaths have risen dramatically. Harsh mountainous deserts simply mean more people die on both sides of the border in their pursuit of safety and resources for their families.

Proposed political solutions to the push-pull factors have included increasing militarization at the border, something the data shows leads to more migrant deaths. In addition, the construction of physical barriers requires an expensive plan for ongoing maintenance. Increased security forces require funding for personnel. Building the 650 miles of border fence that was mandated by Congress in 2008 has cost \$7 billion. In 2009 the Government Accountability Office estimated that completing the rest of the fence and maintaining it for 20 years would cost \$11.6 billion.

Recent border enforcement practices have limited the number of immigrants passing through traditional and safer pathways, but they do not address the reasons people migrate to the U.S.—the so called “push” and “pull” factors influencing migration from Mexico and Central America. Economic despair, increasing violence,

100 remains, but many are left unidentified—a reality that weighs heavily on staff and volunteers of Colibrí and other people doing this kind of work. The DNA program may increase Colibrí’s ability to carry out its mission.

“We close out our day by putting out the candles on the altar and closing the door to our office. These intentional acts are meant to help us, so that we may return home to our families carrying just a little bit less guilt and sadness from our work,” said Reineke.

Killed by bad policy

Recent border enforcement practices have limited the number of immigrants passing through traditional and safer pathways, but they do not address the reasons people migrate to the U.S.—the so called “push” and “pull” factors influencing migration from Mexico and Central America. Economic despair, increasing violence,

The community of Jesus is accustomed to walking with the coffins of the dead, accompanying human remains with singing, prayer, proclamation, and ritual. The church is familiar with speaking words of closure at the graveside: “In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our sister, and we commit her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust ...” Our liturgies speak of the sacredness of each human life. So we must advocate for reform along our southern border in ways that reduce death and suffering. ■

Keith D. Ray II is senior pastor of Clemson (S.C.) United Methodist Church and a board member of the Colibrí Center for Human Rights in Tucson, Ariz.

The Heartbeat of Deep Space

THE FIRST THING NASA cinematographer Nasreen Alkhateeb does when approaching new stories is to look for the heartbeat. A transmedia artist, Alkhateeb spent much of the last year at NASA recording Goddard engineers as they constructed the massive James Webb Space Telescope, set to launch in 2018. The largest-ever space-based telescope is designed to capture images at an astonishing distance, collecting data on the formation of some of the first galaxies in the universe.

Alkhateeb's job, she says, was to translate the complexities of this tool to a non-science audience. For that, she primarily focused on the workers on the ground.

"It's really about all the different fingerprints that have touched this project," she tells me. "The story of



Real *Hidden Figures*: Dorothy Vaughan, Katherine Johnson, and Mary Jackson were "human computers" at NASA when the U.S. made major strides in space.

Our science narratives have too often featured beautiful, rich white people.

the telescope goes hand in hand with telling the story of the individuals and the agencies who are collaborating to build it."

Outer space has twinkled in the American imagination at least since NASA's founding in 1958. One secular hope for salvation lies in inhabiting the heavens—whether on Mars, a source of fascination for *National Geographic* and for SpaceX CEO Elon Musk, or elsewhere.

Yet the role NASA will play in future space exploration is up for debate. Public faith in NASA is strong—the agency is the second most-trusted government institution in America, after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The new Trump administration "clearly values space as an inspirational tool," *Pacific Standard*

opines. But there's quite a bit to suggest a reshuffling of funding priorities from the president, whose advisers have challenged NASA's focus on earth science—including recording the evidence and effects of climate change, which will disproportionately affect poor and marginalized communities.

"NASA should be focused primarily on deep space activities rather than earth-centric work ... better handled by other agencies," wrote Robert Walker and Peter Navarro, senior policy advisers to the Trump campaign, in October.

And as the Trump administration grows ever-cozier with fossil fuel corporations and tech giants while gutting public funding, it's reasonable to ask who will be included in the "inspiring" lens of human-led space exploration. In our science narratives, both fictional and real, there's a long tradition of featuring beautiful, rich white people (as in *Passengers*) and ignoring people of color and women (as revealed in *Hidden Figures*).

To some extent, the future will be built from our present storylines. People mimic what they see. And

there's been no indication that the present administration will do much to challenge the narrative that gives access and opportunity going forward to the wealthy and white.

For storytellers such as Alkhateeb, who calls NASA "probably one of the most diverse places I've ever had the pleasure of working," focusing science stories on the humans building a new future can translate into new narratives of inclusion.

"I think the audience who is interested in knowing more and being exposed to the data the James Webb telescope will provide is always growing. That level of interest and devotion exists outside of political realms," she says.

Whether the inspirational story of humans in space will be built for all of humanity or for the whitest 1 percent very much remains to be seen. As agencies and corporations continue the exciting work of deep space exploration, it's worth focusing our lenses closer to home—on the fingerprints shaping our next chapter. ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is senior associate web editor at *Sojourners*.



luke poem

*You shall love the Lord your God with
all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your strength, and with
all your mind; and your neighbor
as yourself. —Luke 10:27*

such is the lawyer.
we need to know.

road less traveled.
not robert frost.

in that space.
like a typewriter

on table, sewing
machine sitting still

this is why i do this
work. not the walking

dead. not some george
romero extra. like the

young troubled girl in
my neighborhood just

last week. no one reached
out. they called the police.

locked their doors, windows.
they became priest, levite

on the other side of the
road. it was like when

i was 13 standing on the
high dive. gravity take

over. send me to water
below. don't be everyone.

ask of myself each second:
will i cross the road? "it is

written in the law." heart
& soul. love. neighbor.

even if they aren't nice. another
chance to hear that answer.

Brian G. Gilmore teaches public interest law at Michigan State University. His most recent collection of poetry is *We Didn't Know Any Gangsters* (Cherry Castle).

Shutterstock



By Abby Olcese

Unafraid of Hard Questions

With a mix of art, science, and conversation, *The Liturgists* welcome the spiritually hungry.

IT'S A WEDNESDAY night in early November and the sanctuary of Redemption Church in Olathe, Kan., is full. The audience, mostly 20- and 30-somethings, is listening in rapt attention to Mike McHargue, better known as Science Mike. Self-proclaimed science enthusiast McHargue, co-host (with musician and songwriter Michael Gungor) of *The Liturgists Podcast*, is doing a live episode of his solo side podcast, *Ask Science Mike*, as part of a tour for his new book, *Finding God in the Waves*.

After questions ranging from the neurological effect of belief on the brain to the role of women in the church, a young man stands and shares his story. He works at a conservative church, he says, and finds his beliefs are starting to differ from the people he works with. Finally, he asks, "When you start to ask big questions, and you don't know where they're going, and you don't know where they'll take you, how do you find the courage to continue to move forward when you know it might have dramatic consequences?"

"I have terrible news," McHargue answers. "If this continues, you will not fit in where you are. How do I know? There are a thousand people at a Baptist church, who I love dearly, who could not stand to be in a room with me, because I'm the one who rebelled against the tribe." He pauses a moment before continuing. "Here's the other thing. This is good. The way you understood God, that served you for so long, isn't working anymore because you're

Mike McHargue, left, and Michael Gungor doing *The Liturgists Podcast* from the Sundance Film Festival in February 2016.

The Windrider Forum photo



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author of *Born on Third Base*

experiences with doubt and faith, as well as the open, welcoming theological perspective they embrace via their podcast, have a major appeal. It's an appeal that has so far yielded 250,000 subscribers and sold out live events, and led to the publication of *Finding God in the Waves*, McHargue's account of his

McHargue believes millennials, whether they're nones, atheists, or believers, are simply hungry for a community where they can be their authentic selves.

struggles with doubt and experience regaining his faith.

Adam Brewster, a *Liturgists* listener from Iowa, said the podcast speaks directly to parts of his own faith journey. "It's continually given language to experiences I've had and that I know others have had, and as a result has made it possible to talk easily about some complex topics related to faith," he told *Sojourners*. "I don't know if I would've had all those tools at my disposal without the *Liturgists* podcast."

The show, which has taken on topics such as the church and the LGBTQ community, race in America, and multiverse theory, often takes a questioning, learning approach to the topic at hand. McHargue and Gungor have frequently allowed their podcast to be a platform for others to speak instead of an outlet to preach a specific set of beliefs. For example, in their recent episode, "Woman," the hosts gave control of the show over to women to speak about their experiences with sexism in society, home, and the church.

They also, McHargue notes, take listener feedback and constructive criticism very seriously. "People I've talked to who are involved in church work [have] a very odd relationship to critique, where they'll tend to push back or hide," McHargue told *Sojourners*. "[Michael and I] tend to go 'yeah, bring it

Continued on Page 43

growing. ... So I say, get excited."

McHargue and his *Liturgists Podcast* co-host Gungor are no strangers to questions about belief, doubt, and straying from the theological tribe. Both men grew up in conservative evangelical churches, and both men lost their faith as adults, regaining it in a different form later on. It's an experience familiar to plenty of the millennials and Gen-Xers who make up the "nones," the growing portion of the U.S. population who have no religious affiliation.

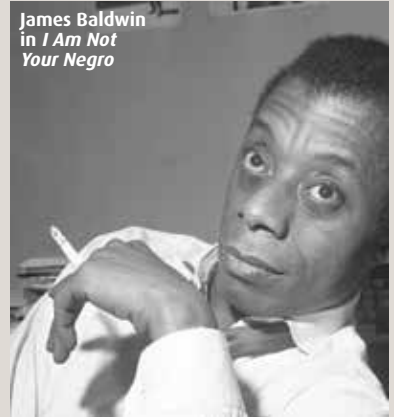
Appealing to the nones

In a 2016 Pew survey on nones, 78 percent of respondents said they were raised in a particular religion but lost their faith as adults. The top reason for leaving: no longer believing in the faith they were raised with. One in five people surveyed cited a dislike of organized religion. Others cited the divisive nature of religion and the church's teachings on homosexuality as reasons they left.

For *Liturgists* listeners who fit into these categories, McHargue and Gungor's

New & Noteworthy

James Baldwin
in *I Am Not
Your Negro*



RIGHTEOUS RAGE

For the critically acclaimed film *I Am Not Your Negro*, filmmaker Raoul Peck drew upon an unfinished manuscript by writer James Baldwin and archival footage to fashion a searing narration about race in America. Opens in theaters in February. Magnolia Pictures

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

In *Islam: What Non-Muslims Should Know*, John Kaltner, a Rhodes College professor of Muslim-Christian relations, explains the basics of Islam, including frequently misunderstood practices. Originally released in 2003, this is a newly revised and expanded edition. Fortress Press

MULTIPLYING GIFTS

A Chicago church divided a financial windfall among its members, \$500 each, telling them to use it to do good in God's world. Laura Sumner Truax and Amalya Campbell tell the practical and inspiring lessons learned in *Love Let Go: Radical Generosity for the Real World*. Wm. B. Eerdmans

DISPLACED PROPHETS

Mishwar Music, by The Homsies, is a three-song EP recorded in a refugee camp in Akkar, Lebanon, with a team of youth from Homs, Syria. It is available for download on Bandcamp. mishwar.org

What Trump Got Right

BY THE TIME you read this, all of the important appointments in the new Trump administration will have been made, and the shape of the disaster that awaits us will be clear. Maybe the new president never did, as *New Yorker* satirist Andy Borowitz suggested, appoint cartel kingpin Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman as head of the Drug Enforcement Administration. But with the appointment of fast-food mogul Andrew Puzder as secretary of labor, vulture capitalist Wilbur Ross as secretary of commerce, and Wall Street vampire Steven Mnuchin as secretary of treasury, Trump certainly spit in the face of the low-income white voters who put him over the top in the industrial Midwest.

Which brings us back to the recurring question: Why did so many blue-collar white people vote for a greedy, self-dealing billionaire in the first place? One answer is that Trump very effectively pushed the buttons of racial resentment (mostly about immigrants and Muslims) that are especially sensitive in less-educated, white areas.

A shadow has hung, unacknowledged, over American life for at least the past 25 years.

There is certainly something to that theory. But it doesn't account for the fact that, as *New York Times* polling whiz Nate Cohn has noted, “Clinton suffered her biggest losses in the places where Obama was strongest among white voters.”

I would argue instead that Trump won primarily because he finally named the shadow that has hung, unacknowledged, over American life for at least the past 25 years: globalism. On June 28, 2016, during one of candidate Trump's rare attempts to stay on message and give a serious public policy statement, he said, “Today, we import



A shuttered factory entrance in North Carolina.

APL-CIO

nearly \$800 billion more in goods than we export. This is not some natural disaster. ... It is the consequence of a leadership class that worships globalism over Americanism.”

As the old saying goes, “Even a stopped clock is right twice a day.” You don't have to buy into his definition of “Americanism” to acknowledge that when Trump talks about international trade deals that serve the interests of a global elite at the expense of workers, he is right. This is the essential truth about the U.S. economy that the corporate media and establishment politicians of both parties have connived to conceal for decades. So 2016 was the year that the American people finally heard some-

body say it: Bernie Sanders said it in the Democratic primaries, and they voted for him in numbers that surprised even the candidate himself. Donald Trump said it all year and, despite his many disqualifying flaws, they made him their president.

Hillary Clinton was once a good woman who wanted to do good things for her country, and she probably still is in many ways. But when she was First Lady, her husband led the fight for NAFTA ratification, gave favored trading status to China, and deregulated Wall Street; in the years

since, she has never disowned that legacy. Later, as secretary of state, she paved the way for the now-dead Trans-Pacific Partnership treaty, and out of office she amassed a vast personal fortune giving secret speeches to her colleagues in the global elite. Meanwhile, wages for U.S. workers continued to stagnate or decline, as they have for decades, and a plague of despair spread across the middle of the country.

Donald Trump doesn't deserve to be our president. His personal behavior and his business conflicts of interest alone should constitute impeachable offenses. But Hillary Clinton deserved to lose.

If we are lucky and we do our jobs as citizens, the Trump era may be brief. But the truth about corporate globalization is now out there, and it can never be covered up again. In addition, thanks to the Sanders campaign, a mass constituency and funding base for economic, racial, social, and environmental justice has been mobilized. Paradoxically enough, the long-term outlook for fundamental social change in the

U.S. may be better than ever. ■



Danny Duncan Collum, author of the novel *White Boy*, teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.

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on,' and then we actually change how we do things just by paying attention to what the people who listen have to say. It makes it much more of a community."

Beginnings

Their collaboration began when McHargue and Gungor met at a party. Both men connected over their mutual doubt and disillusionment with the church.

"We realized that a lot of people today find themselves in an odd situation, in that they find the church too dogmatic, too obsessed with the culture war, but [find] skepticism to be too dismissive of the human desire for mystery and connection and, frankly, a longing for something we would probably call God," McHargue said.

The pair started creating a series of liturgies, recorded as albums, which combined Gungor's music and McHargue's passion for science. The podcast was initially envisioned as a side project to accompany the liturgies, in which the pair could discuss issues of faith, science, and social justice in-depth. But the podcast's success overtook their liturgical efforts and became the main focus.

"It's funny how that became the center of our work. But, it really struck a chord," Gungor told *Sojourners*. "I think there's just so many people that feel similarly caged in by the polarizing factions of the world, and want to be able to ask questions, have conversations, seek truth in a way that doesn't have to be so tribal, doesn't have to be so fearful, that's not threatened. We're just having the conversation because that's why we're there, to have conversations that are open and honest."

Listeners like Cassandra Showalter of Seattle agree. Showalter, who said she grew up among several Christian denominations, told *Sojourners* that for a long time she felt she had to keep her progressive political leanings a secret from friends and family to avoid judgment. "I felt like [I was] the only Christian that felt or believed the way I do," Showalter said. "I became the first person in my family to vote for a Democrat. I remember feeling like I had to hide the fact that I voted for Obama in 2008 because I thought so many of my friends from college and high school would think I had turned my back on my faith."

ONFILM

BY GARETH HIGGINS



Adam Driver in *Paterson*

A POETIC VISION

THERE'S A crazy-beautiful idea in *Paterson*, Jim Jarmusch's film about a bus-driving New Jersey poet (or a poetry-writing bus driver), that makes it honestly inspirational, and perhaps even holy. Inspirational because this story of an ordinary guy in an ordinary town shows us how to see our own ordinariness as full of wonder; holy because this ordinary guy is an icon of integrity—he loves, he lets his yes be yes, and judgmentalism finds no foothold in him.

The crazy-beautiful idea is that everyone is an artist, and that when not subjected to the trappings of academia, the publishing industry, or commerce, creativity can just flow as part of everyday life. Adam Driver is perfectly ordinary enough to be a gift in the lead role (*Paterson* his name, *Paterson* his town), containing his tall muscular frame with gentleness, but ready to use it to protect (a military past is invoked through the subtle use of an old photograph). The Iranian actor Golshifteh Farahani brings a lovely, mild eccentricity to the woman he loves. Their kindness and dreaming together makes a blue-collar house a palace.

Paterson unfolds over a week, and I do mean *unfolds*—the day-by-day account replays the moments that repeat themselves in most of our lives (waking up, the commute, encounters with others, the

walk home, dinner, and a beer at the local pub). Each day's experience reveals more about the people we're watching.

Someone has called *Paterson* a "utopian" film, and although it would be easy to read only the surface and see a pleasant tale of a guy and a girl and the music of words, it earns that term. For one thing, the community in *Paterson* is one of the most racially diverse in movies—there are distinct African-American, Indian-American, and Middle Eastern voices here. The average white guy is in the minority—and utterly satisfied with his life. Not only is he not striving for the public acclaim usually featured in stories of struggling artists, he is so mindful about the world and his place in it that he may not even notice that his poetry isn't winning him any awards (never mind income).

He also may not notice, nor does the film remark upon, the most idyllic fact of his life: In a movie set 40 minutes from Manhattan, in an era where louder voices are telling us to fear the other, home is a white U.S. veteran and a brown-skinned Middle Eastern free spirit, figuring life out together. Another crazy-beautiful idea. Or maybe not so crazy. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.

Gungor said he's heard similar stories from his interactions with listeners. "We've heard parents of someone who's gay, or white people who had no idea that racism was still a thing in America," he said. "Story after story after story of 'I thought that I was crazy,' 'I thought that I was alone,' and then [they] start hearing other people talk about it."

"People are hungry for it"

In addition to the polarizing atmosphere of some churches, McHargue said he attributes the rise of nones to a generational abandonment of public institutions.

"Our classic civic American institutions are all in great distress because we're entering this very post-institutional, almost anti-institutional generational bent," he said. "That actually has a lot of advantages, because people have a looser attachment to institutional civic identity. There's a reason millennials are more justice-minded, more racially aware, more tuned in to the struggle of marginalized groups, because they (millennials) don't hide behind an institution that says these people don't belong."

But that same anti-institutional mindset, McHargue said, has created a lonely generation in need of community. While both McHargue and Gungor have their issues with churches, McHargue is quick to defend the church as a whole.

"I'm hopelessly in love with the church," McHargue said. "I think churches, and especially pastors, have an incredible gift to offer society that's missing in our post-church culture. It's a uniquely powerful social institution, and anthropology and sociology back that up."

Gungor said he's feeling a culturewide desire to challenge institutions even from within, in part caused by efforts like *The Liturgists Podcast* to make previously taboo issues easier to talk about.

"It's funny to see and hear stories of people in more conservative evangelical churches who are listening and having conversations about some of these issues that we've been talking about, who never would have had that conversation two years ago," he said. "There's something happening in culture, in society, that's a longing to sort of shake up that status quo."

... You still feel this surge, something in the air that all of us are feeling, that the way it's been isn't working."

Based on his experiences, McHargue said that millennials of all stripes, whether they're nones, atheists, or believers, are simply hungry for a community where they can be their authentic selves, free of judgment or adherence to a specific set of beliefs. If more churches offer that space, he said, churches may notice a change.

Reviewed by Bailey Shannon

A LIFE IN FULL

***Dorothy Day: The World Will Be Saved by Beauty: An Intimate Portrait of My Grandmother*, by Kate Hennessy. Scribner.**

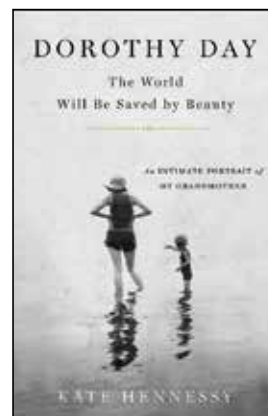
IN DOROTHY DAY: *The World Will Be Saved by Beauty*, author Kate Hennessy, Dorothy Day's youngest granddaughter, gives a deeply intimate and highly credible account of her grandmother, a writer, social activist, and co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement with Peter Maurin in the 1930s. Hennessy explores themes of integrity, vocation, and community, portraying Dorothy Day honestly in her gifts and faults. But the most powerful thread is raw beauty that links together the author to her grandmother, strangers to one another, and people to God.

Day's life was often complicated and marked by loss. Nonetheless her worldview was postured toward the words of poet Max Bodenheimer: "I know not ugliness. It is a mood which has forsaken me." Queen Anne's Lace growing in the city, spinning wool with her grandchildren, her love for the father of her only child, standing in a breadline with seamen, or walking along the shore are all examples of the beauty that both guided and followed Dorothy Day.

Day, who was born in 1897, wasn't yet a Catholic when she moved to New York City from Illinois in 1916 in pursuit of a writing career. She mingled with writers, artists, and radicals and was active in the

"I think the church needs to foster a more communal, accepting, affirming culture," he said. "If they do that, and detach the culture-war thing, people will come back. I say that with some authority. People are flying across oceans to come to our events, because that's the posture we employ, and people are hungry for it." ■

Abby Olcese (@indieabby88) is a writer and freelance film critic based in Kansas.



social movements of the time. Hennessy notes that Day "was not always the clear-eyed visionary that we now see her as." Day considered her life "disorderly" and moved from job to job, from one lover to another; she tried to commit suicide on two different occasions.

But even before Day knew God, she knew that God was leading her. She said, "I cannot help my religious sense, which tortures me unless I do as I believe right."

Day began intensely exploring Catholicism while pregnant with her daughter, Tamar, born in 1926. Tamar's father, Forster Batterham, was hostile to religion.

Day decided to baptize Tamar anyway, a decision, Hennessy writes, that "would set her on a path she never could have imagined, and it would set her daughter on a different path that would take a long time for Tamar to disentangle herself from." Day converted to Catholicism a few months later, recorded as a "quiet affair that gave her no joy" (around the same time, she asked Batterham to move out, since he refused to marry her).

Conversion did not end Day's internal struggles. Hennessy says, "Dorothy was groping in the dark, undergoing a long, slow fundamental shift that would continue to the end of her days."

As her daughter Tamar grew up, Day

was critical and often controlling. This behavior probably stemmed from a desire to protect Tamar from the same mistakes Day had made, but it did more damage than good.

Hennessey describes a letter Day sent to Tamar at a time when Tamar was in deep conflict with her husband and they were struggling to feed their large family:

Dorothy snapped back and wrote the letter that Tamar kept for decades ... the one in which she blamed Tamar for being ungrateful and needy, and taking and taking from the Worker without a thank-you. For not loving her husband enough and not supporting his good qualities. And most unfairly, for accusing Dorothy of neglecting her as a child. Grit your teeth and bear it, she told Tamar, and she wasn't going to write anymore until Tamar made the best of things, did her share in the marriage, and quit complaining.

Eventually Day and Tamar reconciled, but healing took time and space. Tamar and her family left the Catholic Church.

Day, Hennessey writes, said that in all her experiences she “encountered the same old problems, ‘our human condi-

Dorothy Day was not always the clear-eyed visionary that we now see her as.

tion—our discontent.’ She always came back to the needs of flesh-and-blood people, for it was there she felt the love of God and could see the face of God.”

Depression, loneliness, hardship, and mistakes were part of Day’s life. But, Hennessey writes, “Dorothy wrote beautifully about what was wrapped in tragedy. Part of her genius was this ability to see beauty in what didn’t seem to possess it. To repurpose the words of St. John of the Cross, ‘Where you find no beauty, put beauty—and you will find beauty.’” ■

Bailey Shannon lives in a hospitality house, inspired by the Catholic Worker movement, that she helped start in the Near Eastside of Indianapolis. She works at a local community development corporation.

Reviewed by Greg Williams

COALITIONS OF THE WARY

Reclaiming Hope: Lessons Learned in the Obama White House About the Future of Faith in America, by Michael Wear. Thomas Nelson.

THIS IS A PRE-TRUMP book with serious questions for our politics in the age of Trump.

A political memoir from Michael Wear, a young evangelical strategist who worked in Obama’s faith office, it tells stories from the fights of those years and offers a vision of a future faith-in-politics.

I’m a sucker for this kind of memoir: a chastened idealist tells how people worked well together. His ideals have met reality, but Wear still believes politics can help people.

More than merely telling old war stories, *Reclaiming Hope* makes a sustained case for public service. It argues well that Christian love should motivate us to become active within existing political institutions. Wear highlights specifically race and religious freedom as fields needing further work (a great combination, designed to irritate people all across the ideological spectrum). We need to figure out how to live together and build cultures that respect people and enable them to live without fear.

Although Wear avoids cynicism (and criticizing his former coworkers), his time in high-level politics *did* chasten him. His reflections on the contentious religious issues raised during his Obama administration tenure, particularly abortion, the contraception mandate, and marriage equality, although only comprising a portion of the book, raise necessary questions for any local or national progressive coalition.

We need to ask ourselves how much ideological conformity is necessary to work together. Can we rest in calling for abortion to be “safe, legal, and rare?” How flexible can we be in seeking to advance policy priorities? Sometimes the appropriate response is not flexibility, but Wear argues that we need to be fundamentally open to diversity in coalitions as we work for policy in a pluralistic society.

To particularize these broad questions: Was Obama’s “evolution” on marriage equality disingenuous? Some of the president’s advisers claim that Obama shifted his opinion back in 2007. As Wear reports, Obama’s vision of marriage was a live question during his 2008 campaign. Obviously, it isn’t wrong

to change your mind. The question remains whether Obama was engaging in what Wear calls “political gamesmanship” by not being forthcoming about his true beliefs during the campaign. If so, it becomes even more difficult for theologically conservative folks to trust liberal assurances.

Regardless of difficult questions he raises, Wear’s stories are encouraging. He remains hopeful that politicians and policy wonks can collaborate to improve life for millions.

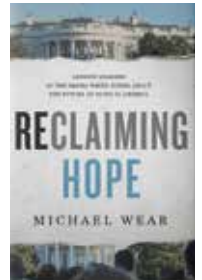
I appreciate Wear’s desire to build coalitions and work across party lines. As he notes, in our current system this is becoming increasingly difficult because few partisans are willing to build coalitions. To speak bluntly—Republicans don’t need Democratic support on a federal level since the party controls both chambers of Congress and the executive branch, and Democrats aren’t inclined to play nicely with people they see as holding increasingly extreme ideological views.

How does bipartisanship work in this setting? I hope we can figure it out and that the progressive movement shows itself willing to build coalitions with those holding a range of social perspectives, rather than insisting on a limited orthodoxy with its partners.

Though this is a pre-Trump book, we need a politics that accounts for Trump to move forward. The questions that Wear asks are key to building broad coalitions, and his stories give us hope that these kinds of coalitions are possible. All sorts of groups and allies are needed to fight resurgent racism and other movements seeking to return to an era of hegemonic patriarchal control.

Wear’s closing charge is more necessary than ever before: “There is truly no place for fear or anxiety about the future. ... Rather we need to act.” ■

Greg Williams is communications director at an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C.



Interview

WEALTH AND THE COMMON GOOD

WRITER AND ACTIVIST Chuck Collins, the great-grandson of meatpacker Oscar Mayer, gave up his inheritance when he was 26 and has spent the subsequent decades working to address economic inequality and environmental issues. Via email with *Sojourners* senior associate editor Julie Polter, he discussed his newest book, *Born on Third Base: A One Percenter Makes the Case for Tackling Inequality, Bringing Wealth Home, and Committing to the Common Good* (Chelsea Green)—and why organizing and building community across economic lines is good for everyone.

Sojourners: What is your main message in this book?

Chuck Collins: I want to invite wealthy and affluent people to “come home”—to return from wandering in the desert of wealth and privilege, the disconnection from community and place. It means putting a personal stake in reversing the deepening ruts of extreme wealth inequality and the ecological crisis. If we read the signs of the times, we understand this is both in our selfish interest as well as strengthening the common good. These inequalities and ecological challenges are undermining the quality of life for everyone, including wealthy people. There is no wealth on a degraded planet.

By reconnecting with people and places, we come out of exile. Racial and economic advantage is a “disconnection drug”—distancing us from both the suffering and the joy of being a human.

Many of the ultra-wealthy are “placeless” and “stateless”—literally holding multiple passports with money globalized in offshore financial centers around the world. So “coming home” means bringing the wealth home too—taking it out of the offshore tax havens, out of the global financial casino (“going off the Wall Street grid,” as one of the people I interview in *Born on Third Base* says), and out of the fossil fuel industry.

Whether you are ultra-rich or affluent, bringing the wealth home means redirecting capital to the life-enhancing sectors of the economy, the real economy of goods and services, the emerging new food and energy systems. It means sharing more generously,

paying our fair share of taxes, and challenging the myths of deservedness that justify inequality.

Another message: Don’t give up on anyone. A lot of wealthy people are waiting to be called to something more meaningful than consumption. We must creatively invite them to the table of vibrant and faith-based movements to fix the future.

Why is it important for all of us to invest time and money in our local economies?

We are heading into an economic and ecological transition. We all have a stake in building a local resilient and sustainable economy. This cannot be a “gated resilience” in enclaves, but a commitment to foster equality and racial justice through broadly owned enterprises and meeting more of our needs in local and regional spaces. We need to rebuild our mutual-aid muscles for the challenges ahead.

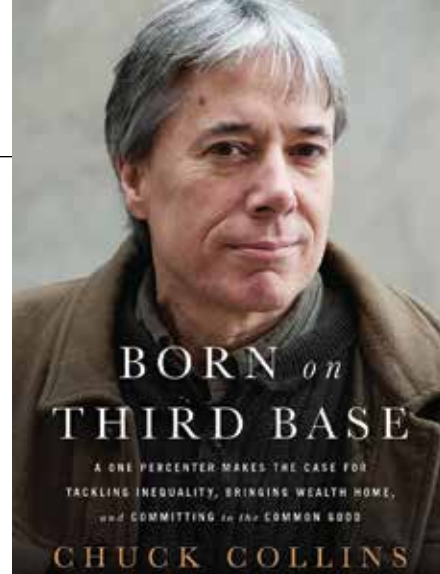
How does having the ultra-rich officially in control of much of our federal government refocus your work?

Yes, it’s the opposite of “Occupy Wall Street”—it’s like the 1 percent, Wall Street, and Big Fossil Fuel just more deeply occupied the executive and most of the legislative branch. We have to engage in holding actions to stop some of the worst things from coming to pass. Anti-tax forces

Racial and economic advantage is a “disconnection drug”—distancing us from both the suffering and the joy of being a human.

will try to abolish the estate tax, one of the few policies that interrupt dynastic wealth accumulation, along with other progressive taxes. We should resist these blatant efforts to shift the rules along with all the other policies that will attack the most vulnerable.

I’ve noticed a lot of wealthy people waking up in the aftermath of the Trump election, realizing we need to support organizing efforts in a number of arenas. Networks such as the Patriotic Millionaires are engaged in efforts to defend progressive taxes and press for higher wage policies and



campaign finance reform.

We also need to press for state and local policy innovations to reduce inequality. A number of states are looking at ways to raise revenue and invest in broader opportunity. For example, states could tax inherited wealth above \$2 million and dedicate it to debt-free higher education. Cities are now centers of discussion about using the tools they have to reduce inequality. The city of Portland, Ore., just passed an ordinance taxing corporations with excessive CEO pay at higher rates.

How can people of faith help change dominant narratives about wealth and privilege?

One force that holds unsustainable inequalities in place are the stories of deservedness that justify some people having more than others. Some folks are not disturbed by statistics about inequality because “those people worked hard for that wealth,” or they say, “my wealth and advantage is the result of my own efforts—I didn’t get any help.”

These powerful stories have a grip on how we perceive ourselves in the world. But they fail to recognize the role of God’s grace and the “commonwealth” we build together that truly sustains us and is the foundation for most of the opportunities we have. If we are white, we

sometimes forget the powerful advantages that flow our way. We think it’s all about us. Of course, individuals do matter—and the choices we make matter. But we would benefit from a more nuanced and more honest reckoning of what sustains us.

One thing we can all do is tell true stories—about the role of grace, luck, family help, public investments, and subsidies in our lives. We can disrupt and debunk the mythology of individual deservedness and white advantage—while celebrating individual choices, sacrifices, and gifts. ■

Trump vs. Jesus

I HAIL FROM a theological tradition that places the highest value on epistemology, the study of how we think about God, yet tends to invest little energy on ethics, the study of how we are called to interact in the world.

Likewise, many in my theological tradition place ultimate value on one's capacity for faith in particular sets of beliefs—and tend to demonstrate hostility toward historical, anthropological, philosophical, and scientific methods to shape those beliefs, unless those methods happen to support the tradition's

horrors if she or he is elected. It doesn't matter if the Democrat or the Republican promises to protect the poor. All that matters is which one assures the voter's stature in the afterlife. And who wants to go to hell because they voted for the Antichrist? Not me.

Perhaps this is why many white evangelicals were not perturbed when Trump's policy convictions seemed to change by the hour before and since the election. And perhaps it is why so many white evangelicals put faith in Trump's profession of Christian faith despite his unchristian vow to attack the well-being of those Jesus entreats his followers to care for the most:

- Trump vowed to enact policies that hurt the *hungry* through tax cuts for the rich while cutting food stamps for the poor.
- Trump vowed to enact policies that show contempt for the *thirsty* by crippling the Environmental Protection Agency, which protects vulnerable people's water supply.
- Trump vowed to enact policies that sell-out the *sick* by repealing the Affordable Care Act.
- Trump vowed to keep *immigrants* out by building a wall.
- Trump vowed to increase the number of those *imprisoned* by ramping up the same "law and order," "stop and frisk" policies that multiplied America's black and Latino prison populations over the past four decades.
- And Trump vowed to enact policies that strip resources from the *naked* by adopting the economic plan of Rep. Paul Ryan, which would rest more than two-thirds of budget cuts on the backs of poor people, including seniors.

faith-born premises. Think: climate-change denial. This article of faith is partially rooted in profound belief in a particular reading of Genesis 1:26 and human dominion. It is not rooted in science.

Perhaps this reveals one reason why so much of the white evangelical community saw no red flags when Donald Trump refused to show his tax returns. They *believed* in him. They did not need to *see* evidence.

Perhaps this is the reason it does not faze many white evangelicals that Trump trafficked in fake news, conspiracy theory, and innuendo to win the presidency and continues the practices in the aftermath. Trump's relationship to fact may mirror their own. It almost seems as if life in this world and the hard facts that govern life have nothing to do with anything. I'm thinking of the fold-over tracts or Facebook posts that fly through evangelical circles during every presidential election cycle. They claim the Democratic candidate is the Antichrist and warn of the



Eighty-one percent of white evangelicals are evidently fine with all this, because history means nothing. Data means nothing. Secular law means nothing. Ethics mean nothing. He said he is a Christian. They believe in Trump's "Christian heart."

And perhaps this is why so many white evangelicals could stomach Trump's bigotry, misogyny, and xenophobia—because their heaven-focused belief has sanitized their read of scripture, causing many to view the entire Old Testament as "another dispensation" not relevant for today. And it has led to misinterpretation of Paul's declaration: "No Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female in Christ Jesus." Pastors have preached that this means we're all welcome in heaven—and missed Paul's pointed call to renounce the power distinctions imposed by empire.

And so, ethics had nothing to do with these evangelicals' votes.

Here is the question that haunts me: Has the Trump presidency revealed evidence of a truth we have not wanted to see? That the one who said "I am the way" (ethics), "the truth" (epistemology), "and the life" (shalom) is increasingly irrelevant in evangelical America? ■

Lisa Sharon Harper is chief church engagement officer for Sojourners and author of The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right.



Has the Trump presidency revealed a truth about evangelical America that we have not wanted to see?

Back With My Heart

THIS IS WEIRD, I know, but I miss Lent when it's over. There is something to what Otis Moss III calls the "blue note preaching" that feels human and humanizing. So much of life is sorrowful. At Lent we can name that sadness explicitly. Don't get me wrong—Easter is awesome. But as soon as it's done and the lilies are put away and the crowds diminish, I miss the strong scrubbing brush on our corroded hearts and the promise of God's unending mercy.

There is a clarity in Lent. Repent! Turn around! Now! This is not at all a negative message. When we repent, we empty ourselves, pour ourselves out, open ourselves up. We are normally so full of self-regard. As a friend of mine says, "I'm always right." What? "I mean, if I knew something was a lie, I'd stop thinking it." Donald Trump couldn't have said it better. The thing is, we all think we're right all the time. Lent says, "No you're not. Whoever you are." Sarah Coakley's work brilliantly has shown the good news of what scripture calls "kenosis," self-emptying. This is a dangerous teaching. Women and minorities and people out of power are often abused by being told to make themselves less. Coakley argues that self-emptying in forms such as silent prayer is actually the most empowering thing we can do. Because then God's Holy



Spirit fills us up. Grants us a power we can't imagine. Makes us fully human.

So repent away, preachers and friends. There is no better piece of good news around.

Jason Byassee holds the Butler chair in homiletics and biblical hermeneutics at Vancouver School of Theology in British Columbia.

[MARCH 5]

God Tumbles After Us

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

THERE'S ENOUGH here for a lifetime of sermons. Let's start with what *not* to say. Adam and Eve did not fall because of sex, or feminine frailty, or because God is vindictive. And nothing that's offered as a temptation here is a bad thing in and of itself (knowledge, wisdom, fruit, or in Matthew, bread, preservation from harm, or power). The mistake is in *how* those things are sought: by asking "Did God say ... ?" or by taking the devil's shortcuts. The fall was no Promethean grab for power that God had to whack down. It was a stumbling into ruin that God looks on with pity, to paraphrase Julian of Norwich. Then God plunges into the ditch with us.

The rabbis have long noticed a curious addition to the list of prohibitions that Eve gives the serpent: "Nor shall you touch it." God didn't say not to touch the tree in Genesis 2:16-17. The rabbis filled in the gap: Adam must have added this prohibition. The serpent, knowing this, after his invitation in 3:5 grabbed the tree ... and shook it hard. In other words, don't add to God's gracious

law, or make faith harder than it has to be. In Gary Anderson's *The Genesis of Perfection*, he gives the example of Michelangelo, who demonstrates this with his Sistine Chapel ceiling—where Eve majestically reaches for the fruit while Adam lustily grabs for it.

Paul's is the most important point. If Adam's fall had such widespread consequences for humanity, Christ's grace must have wider consequences still. Paul says it four different ways in four short verses (Romans 5:15-19). Christian theology has often spoken as though Adam's disaster were universal and Christ's grace repairs things only somewhat. Hogwash, Paul says. Sin and brokenness are meager. Our rebellion against God is only temporary, partially successful, and pathetic rather than victorious. Christ's grace is wider reaching, deeper impacting, and more expansive in its effects by far.

Adam and Eve and all of us have fallen into a ditch indeed. But Jesus comes and claws us out of the graves we have dug for ourselves. Listen. You can hear digging getting closer.

[MARCH 12]

Hell And Back?

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121;
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

JOHN BARCLAY'S BOOK *Paul and the Gift* makes a novel argument. We're not surprised to learn that God is the one who creates and raises the dead (Romans 4:17). We are surprised to learn that Paul ranks the presence of holiness even among us gentiles as an equally great miracle. Paul's missionary practice has seen even those furthest from God come to faith. Paul reasons from that experience: Wow! Apparently, God can do anything.

This sort of counter-conventional calling is what God is always up to. In Genesis 12, Abram is a nomad far from home minding his business when God says "You! I'm going to make a nation from you so beautiful that all nations will be blessed through you." Abram points out he has no children. Perfect! God replies. Everyone will recognize then that this is all my goodness and not yours (Romans 4:4-5).

As gentiles, we don't belong to the God of Israel inherently. The gospel is not our good news. It all belongs to the Jews (John 4:22). And then, astoundingly, God makes good on promises to Israel through the death and resurrection of Jesus. And now even we stumble into divine favor. Who among us could have planned this convention-shattering salvation? We lift up our eyes to the hills of how we think religion is supposed to work. And we're surprised that our help comes from elsewhere—from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 121:1-2).

Elaine Heath, the dean at Duke Divinity School, says that Christians' responsibility is to go to hell. Because that's what God does. Not content to take flesh with us and die for us, God descends all the way to Hades for us. From now on, those who want to find God have to go to hell—to where people are suffering, because there is Jesus, bringing grace, relief, mercy. Careful if you go. You'll leave as confused as Nicodemus (what'd that Jesus dude say?!). The crazy way that God calls invites old people to get born anew and all of us to notice where the unpredictable Spirit is blowing. God always does the unexpected. So get ready to be surprised again.

[MARCH 19]

Grumble Less

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11;
John 4:5-42

MONKS AND NUNS start every day by chanting Psalm 95. It says everything that needs saying: Open our lips to praise, God made us and not the reverse, let us listen, and harden not our hearts as at Meribah. Like at Massah in the wilderness.

Wait, what? The first few lines could work in any contemporary praise chorus. But those songs are not known for their attention to the particular, like geography and proper names. What happened at Massah (test) and Meribah (quarrel)?

As every pastor knows, God's people grumble. We know this because we grumble loudest. Where is this provision we were promised? Did God call us just to kill us? In Exodus 17, God tells Moses to strike the rock, there's water, and everyone drinks and lives (see here 1 Corinthians 10:4—and imagine Jesus shambling in the desert with the people as a great rock!). In the Numbers 20 version of the story, which Psalm 95 more closely reflects, the people are more strongly rebuked for their grumbling (Numbers 20:12).

Faith is serious. So is life. There are no do-overs. We're not to grumble. We're to love.

Jesus shows us how. Elaine Heath preaches John 4 as a story about Jesus healing someone who has been sexually abused (see her *We Were the Least of These*). The Samaritan woman who meets Jesus has been with many men, who use her up and send her away (4:18). She comes to the well at the heat of the day, presumably to avoid being seen (4:6). After she trusts Jesus, she runs back and proclaims that she's met someone who knows everything she's ever done (4:29, 39). You can almost hear them thinking: "Sister, *everyone* knows everything you've ever done." But Jesus has uncovered her pain and gazed on it not with judgment, but with life-restoring love. She's an honored evangelist now (4:39). A whole community is blessed through her work forever, as her wound is transfigured into joy for her and many (4:40-41).

She did what Psalm 95 asked. She didn't test or quarrel (and if anyone had any right to, it was her). Jesus enabled her, instead, to love.

[MARCH 26]

Heart Scan

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23;
Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

WHAT IF I told you Psalm 23 wasn't always the most beloved psalm of all? William Holladay argues that it became cherished because of the carnage of the U.S. Civil War. It took that scale of destruction for folks to find the deep comfort in the shepherding Lord—his staff, his comfort, his table of enemy-love.

The heart is a sacred place. It's not easy to get in there. Once in, it's hard to get out. As preachers, someone said, we're like open-heart surgeons. We hold that heavy, squishy, life-giving thing in our hands each week. Take care. You can do a lot of good. Or harm.

The story from Samuel suggests the Lord sees the heart better than any MRI sees inside us (16:7). Samuel knows a king will come from the house of Jesse, but seven of his sons pass by and Samuel says, "No, not him either." By the end he asks, "Is that all you got?!" "Well, there is one more, of so little account he's minding the animals." "That one!" God says. The one no one else regards or wants—that one is king, right now.

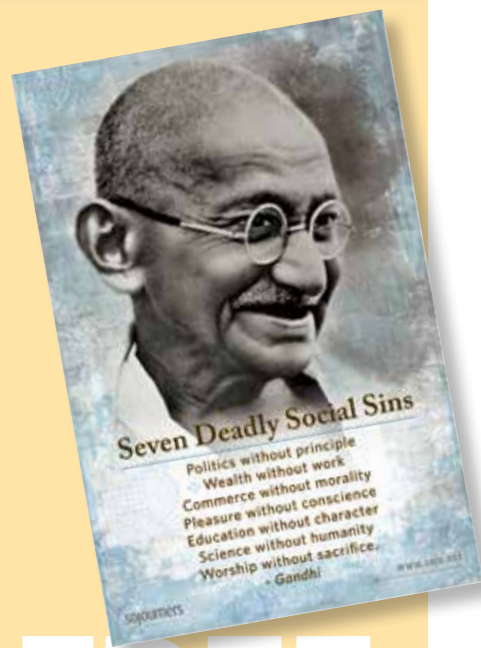
I think it's comforting that God can see our hearts. David had a mighty one. What about our feeble ones? Will God take care inside our fragile rib cage (Jeremiah 31:33)?

J. Louis Martyn's great book *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* is a long, luxurious reading of John 9. He argues (some disagree) that Jesus' opponents putting the healed blind man out of the synagogue (9:22, 34) reflects not Jesus' own day but that of Jewish Christians in John's day. That is, John reads his own situation and Jesus' ministry in light of each other. This is precisely what we preachers do in every word we speak. We see double. We read our church's life and God's life in light of one another. The blind man longs to see. His poor parents are dragged in. Religious authorities, like we do, mistrust the upstart and the new. But here's what finally matters: opened eyes (9:30) and seeing Jesus (9:37).

That—and a renewed heart—is what Lent is all about. ■

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An Open Letter to Our Burglars

WHAT A MESS. What is it about you modern burglars that insists on such lack of tidiness, such disrespect for the common courtesy of wiping one's feet? Not to mention a callous disregard for a law of physics, the one that states that every action has a reaction. Drawers, to name one example, close as well as open. No need to drag them out onto the floor, scattering the contents under foot, when you simply could have pulled them out part way—reviewed the contents, made your selections—and then closed. I understand the need for haste. Burglars, as a rule, are on a tight schedule. But the window of opportunity was, in our case, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., give or take.

As you probably know, the iconic symbol of your occupation is an unshaven man with a sock cap and a crowbar, a jittery skulker no mother would be proud of. He

leave for work and then, at a convenient time, start your own work day. One envies this, of course, since you can sleep in most mornings, setting the alarm for 9-ish, and listen to NPR as you linger over a second cup of coffee. Then you can take some “me time” before heading off to work.

At our house, however, your efforts did not require a good night's sleep, since you were relatively unhindered getting through the first level of our home's security. You just pushed a hand—no doubt malevolently gloved—through the screen door of the porch, and then unlatched the eye hook that I had personally installed wearing, as I recall, a tool belt that conveyed a sense of manly worth and a strong confidence in my work. You were not impressed.

Our side window—security level two—offered similar ease of entry because the Andersen window company, using state-of-the-art engineering available in 1987, made its locks out of ... plastic. With all due respect and, admittedly, the benefit of hindsight, this was idiotic. The locked windows can easily be opened by pulling down on the top one with the physical force of a 9-year-old suffering from the flu. The “lock” just pops off, making a little plastic noise on the floor that is unlikely to alert the neighbors or disturb the cat whose value as a deterrent was quickly disproved. He hid in the basement.

On the other hand—and I give the Andersen people full credit for this—broken window latches need no costly repair. I merely popped

the decorative lock back into place and the window was fully functional again and ready to facilitate your next break-in.

You should know that although I haven't changed those window locks, I *have* put in large wooden dowels that

keep the lower window from lifting. Although, come to think of it, they won't keep the upper window from being lowered from the outside, and

I don't know why

I'm telling you this. Nor would the new sign outside offer much in the way of real security, since

I just borrowed it from a neighbor and don't actually have an alarm system, *but I don't know why I'm telling you that, either!*

REGARDLESS, I doubt you'll be back since the risk of jail time probably wasn't worth the women's bicycle and digital camera that, as far as we can tell, was all you took. And you *will* be apprehended. The police officers who responded looked at the evidence and immediately ascertained that you were male, thus quickly reducing the possible suspects to only one gender. It was also apparent that social media was being enlisted to hasten your capture since one of the officers appeared to be using Facebook during much of his visit. The other officer was on his phone a lot, too, but that seemed to be personal.

IN THE MEANTIME, I'll keep my eyes open for a male on a women's bike, probably looking well-rested. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.



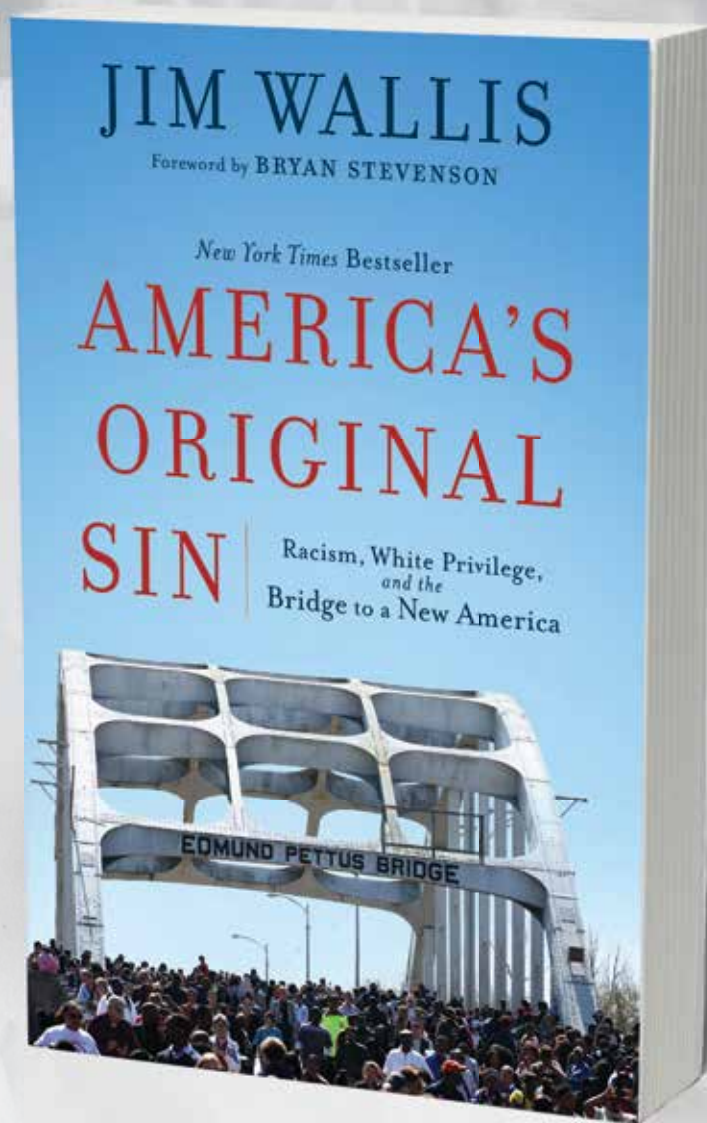
Ken Davis

**You came. You took.
You left without vacuuming.**

enters a home in the dead of night while the residents sleep, their faces relaxed and undisturbed by the beam of a flashlight briefly flickering over them, then illuminating the dresser where most people keep their valuables. In our case, as you discovered, there were none, only old Trader Joe's receipts and a couple tear-stained movie ticket stubs that I can't yet toss. (Note to Disney: You can stop now. You'll never make *anything* as good as *Moana* and ... darn it ... I promised myself I wasn't going to cry again!)

GIVEN YOUR occupation's nocturnal custom, we were surprised to return home and discover you had robbed us in broad daylight. Apparently, your new business model is to wait until your victims

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